SSRI MOVES WEST
SECOND LOCATION TO OPEN FALL 2013
As an economist, what appealed to you about the position of Director of the Social Science Research Institute?

**Nechyba:** During my tenure as Department Chair, we built an economics faculty that is intellectually broad and engaged on problems of deep social significance. But solutions to such problems rarely lie fully within the boundaries of a single discipline, and so I came to appreciate the extraordinary power that lies in collaborations. To be more precise, I came to understand interdisciplinarity not as something internal to any individual scholar — but rather as something that happens when individuals, who are rooted in disciplines, find ways of leveraging their expertise with that of others who find their homes in different disciplines. The pursuit of such collaboration lies at the heart of SSRI. I became interested in directing SSRI when I was made aware of an opportunity to place this mission of the Institute much more at the core of the university than has been possible in SSRI's current configuration.

**QUESTIONS:**

**Tom Nechyba, director of SSRI, gives the scoop on SSRI West**

SSRI is home to a group of affiliates addressing research questions on race and gender, decision science, globalization, population, networks and policy around children and families. In fall 2013 there will be a second location for SSRI known as SSRI West over in Gross Hall on West Campus. Why the move and how does the new location change the mission of SSRI?

**Nechyba:** That is precisely the opportunity that got me excited about coming to SSRI. The SSRI affiliated centers are doing extraordinarily important work, but the work is largely taking place off campus in our current Ninth Street location. SSRI therefore has only had limited success in engaging the larger social science community of researchers and students on the main campus. SSRI West gives us a chance to move the Institute to the next level — to bring the data, methods and educational infrastructures to Gross Hall and employ these to incubate and facilitate new research collaborations involving teams of faculty, post-docs, graduate students and, in many instances, undergraduates. This expands our mission at SSRI — from one primarily focused on supporting our affiliated centers to one that seeks to engage scholars across the university with one another. I call it an “expanded” mission because it will strengthen our support of the affiliated centers — by providing new opportunities for these centers to collaborate with one another and with those currently not engaged with SSRI.

**People are hearing a lot of buzz about the new space in Gross Hall — modern look and feel, team rooms, coffee bar, places to mingle, etc. What is one area of the new space that you are most excited about?**

**Nechyba:** I think the area that excites me most is what we are beginning to call “The Connection” — the large open space in which scholars who might never run into each other will cross paths as they engage in projects, teach classes, attend seminars or just come for a cup of coffee. The most innovative places in the world — places like Apple and Google — figured this out some time ago: The best new ideas rarely come from the top down, but rather emerge from the bottom up as unexpected interactions spark new ideas that lie outside our pre-conceived boxes. “The Connection” is our attempt to bring that idea to life in the social sciences — to connect people with one another in ways that create the new and unexpected, and to maximize the chance for the success of such connections with enough structured activity and infrastructure.

**What group of people do you think will benefit most from SSRI West?**

**Nechyba:** Faculty and students — whether or not they are currently engaged with our affiliated centers — who ask big questions of societal importance but need a place and an infrastructure to connect to others who are asking similar questions. And this doesn’t mean just social scientists. While the questions are often at the core of the social sciences, the necessary collaborations may lie with experts in other fields, experts like those in the Information Futures group that deals with Big Data and is moving to the third floor of Gross Hall, just above SSRI West; or experts in the natural sciences whose expertise lies in areas as varied as environmental science and brain science; or experts in the humanities that can help to bring the human dimension to projects at the core of the social sciences.

**What do you think is the biggest assumption or misconception about interdisciplinary research and education?**

**Nechyba:** I think the biggest misconception we have is that interdisciplinarity resides in the individual. It rarely does. Rather, interdisciplinarity resides in teams — teams that find ways of harnessing disciplinary expertise in the pursuit of solutions that require multiple areas of expertise. None of this is easy, and it can’t happen in a vacuum. The role of places like SSRI is to, in a sense,
provide and fertilize the soil in which such teams can grow and thrive — through space, infrastructure and connections.

**Where do you see SSRI in the next three years?**

**Nechyba:** My hope is that three years from now, no one at Duke will wonder what it is that SSRI does — that, through the connections created in SSRI West, we will play a central role in supporting the university’s mission of research and teaching in the service of society. At the same time, I anticipate our affiliated centers will have found ways to engage with one another and with new communities through the opportunities that SSRI West provides.
SSRI WEST MEANS MORE COLLABORATION, INNOVATION.

SSRI West may be new, but it’s already sparking innovation. In fall 2013, SSRI will move into renovated space on the second floor of Gross Hall — a space with glass-walled offices, team rooms, a coffee bar, a “winter garden” with space to saunter and places to sit, and numerous open areas where researchers can collaborate casually. Social and behavioral science researchers will be able to work side by side with colleagues, including researchers from other disciplines, and look over one another’s shoulders to learn what questions each is exploring and how data are being collected and analyzed.
Guillermo Sapiro, a professor of electrical and computer engineering, expects the close proximity to colleagues from other disciplines to inspire innovation, as researchers let their natural curiosity feed off each other.

“Spontaneous ideas don’t happen in pre-defined meetings,” Sapiro said. “SSRI West will open a lot of possibilities, like an incubator.”

In contemplating how the space might be used across disciplines, SSRI director Tom Nechyba introduced Sapiro to Helen Egger, associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences. One of Sapiro’s research projects videotapes interactions of young children in a laboratory classroom to look for indications of autism. Egger’s team also has a large body of videotaped interactions from her study of early childhood anxiety. After Nechyba connected the two researchers, they collaborated to look for new markers and develop tools for early diagnoses that would not be possible without the large volume of tagged video data from both teams.

“We can make a great contribution to society,” Sapiro said. “If it weren’t for the SSRI West initiative, Helen and I would never have met. SSRI is already making sure that people who weren’t talking to one another before are talking now.”

SSRI will retain its current space in Erwin Mill for its grants office and affiliates and will continue to provide access to experimental laboratory research space. SSRI West in Gross Hall will house vast data resources (both restricted and unrestricted) and a “Connection Bar” for training in software used for research projects. The open, airy space furnished in modern décor will have large displays and an atmosphere that welcomes collaboration.

“Architecture matters,” said Robert Calderbank, dean of natural sciences at Trinity College and interim director of Innovation and entrepreneurship.

“With SSRI close to us in the building, there’s a chance to do something really transformative.”

Without shared space, researchers in different disciplines work separately and may meet every week or two to give one another feedback. Working side by side allows that interactive feedback to
happen immediately, without scheduling an appointment.

“SSRI West will allow interdisciplinary training and knowledge that you get by being in the same room together 10 hours a day,” Sapiro said.

Putting SSRI’s vast array of databases in close proximity with experts in data analysis is a natural fit. Larry Carin, the William H. Younger Professor of engineering, will be among those sharing the space in Gross Hall. He anticipates that he and his graduate students and post-docs will be involved in many research projects with SSRI. “People in that space are statistically and mathematically inclined,” Carin said. “We like to analyze data of all sorts. SSRI has all kinds of social science data that need to be analyzed. Being in close proximity to one another is critical.” Carin convinced Provost Peter Lange to share a decade of data showing which courses Duke students had taken. Carin’s analysis of the data helped him understand how students navigate the curriculum and got him thinking about how departments might design new courses to draw students in. He created a system that talked back to students looking for advice on which courses to take next: “Students who look like you selected from this set of courses; why not check them out?” The project won Duke’s Startup Challenge in 2010.

That’s the type of innovation that excites Calderbank.

“Every time you explore a database in a new way or join two different databases, you have an opportunity to produce a decision-support tool. Every time you produce a decision-support tool, you have an opportunity to do something entrepreneurial.”

— ROBERT CALDERBANK
ALEXANDRA COOPER, Associate Director for Education and Training at SSRI, stresses that the move to West Campus doesn’t mean SSRI is abandoning its Erwin Mill location. Quite the contrary: the new space means SSRI is expanding its reach. “Many of our core constituents are on West Campus,” she said. “Being close to where they can walk to our space will make it much easier for them to drop in for research guidance or a workshop.”

Cooper expects SSRI West to result in enhanced and expanded workshop offerings. Together with colleagues, she is exploring options that include developing a core set of modules to include such topics as survey research, social network analysis, and quantitative and qualitative analysis. “These are areas where we would create teams of experts and provide training, dispatching individuals to go out to the different research teams and make sure they have the training and skills to do their work,” Cooper said. “We are considering different models. One exciting idea is to expand PARISS [the Program for Advanced Research in Social Sciences] to bring in more graduate students and give them instruction as trainers. They will then have the opportunity to work with teams as trainers and potentially, as collaborators. We are also discussing ways to use technology to provide just-in-time training or to allow scholars seeking to apply new technologies to familiarize themselves with a new method or software package before they meet with a consultant or attend training.”

Last year, SSRI pushed for greater one-on-one assistance with the launch of its help desk. Currently located in the Erwin Mill building, the help desk is staffed by SSRI members every afternoon. Researchers are able to use the help desk in two ways — drop in to ask for assistance with a problem or schedule appointments with staff or student members with expertise in a particular area. Considerable thought is being devoted to how best to use the technological capabilities SSRI West will offer. The goal is to make access to the “Connection Bar” readily available to off-campus researchers via such tools as instant messaging and Skype.

PARISS fellows play an integral role in the help desk’s success, Cooper said. These scholars, who are advanced graduate students applying interdisciplinary methods in their dissertation research, not only mentor undergraduates, but also assist other graduate students and faculty who need help in specific expertise areas. Each fellow spends between 10 to 15 hours at the help desk each semester, a role that helps
It’s more than a standard help desk, it’s a “Connection Bar.” A place for students and others engaged in research to stop by or schedule an appointment for help with software issues, data questions and more.

integrate them into the SSRI community.

Amy Dent, a 2011-2012 PARISS fellow, said stationing fellows at the help desk puts a personal touch on the interdisciplinary collaboration possible through SSRI.

“One of the benefits is having a clear and identifiable person who is able and willing to help in a centrally located place,” Dent said. “We’re there for students who, otherwise, might try to work problems out on their own.”

During Dent’s year as a PARISS fellow, she assisted numerous students who conducted research that required some form of outside consulting. As a measure of the SSRI help desk’s success, she said, many students turned to it as a resource.

“Many of our core constituents are on West Campus. Being close to them, where they can walk to our space, will make it much easier for them to drop in for research guidance or for a workshop.”

— ALEXANDRA COOPER

Although faculty and students use and appreciate the help desk in the Erwin Mill building, Dent said, having closer proximity to the same services on West Campus will be a great benefit.

“Moving consulting over to West Campus should encourage more people to go in physically rather than e-mail or talk on the phone,” she said. “It will increase the number of people who stop by, because the PARISS fellows consulting has a reputation of being a place where graduate and undergraduate students can come and ask questions without feeling intimidated.”

SSRI MOBILE

But even with offices in the Erwin Mill building and on West Campus, there is still more demand for consulting than SSRI staff and PARISS fellows can handle, Cooper said. To meet the need, SSRI will likely turn to mobile technology — and undergraduate creativity — and create a smartphone app.

Projected to be available by the start of fall classes in 2013, SSRI plans to build the app in one of two ways. Either teams of undergraduates will compete to have their designs selected, or the app development could be introduced as a computer science class assignment. Either way, the app’s purpose will focus on assisting faculty and students.

“Our goal is an app that will help researchers develop expertise in particular statistical techniques or software packages,” Cooper said. “Researchers would go to the app, plug in their need, and the app would give them a list of different resources they could use.” The app will point users to appropriate consultants and help them schedule appointments, as well as highlight additional online training sources. The ideal app would also keep track of which resources individual researchers have used and allow reviews.

Ultimately, SSRI West and its design are intended to foster and boost the collaborative spirit for which SSRI is already known. Shared work spaces, glass-front offices, and a coffee bar will give faculty and staff more opportunities to bump into each other and have spontaneous conversations.

“We’re trying to foster the informal discussions between different research teams that might not happen in a more physically structured workspace,” she said. “We also hope this openness will help ensure that we serve and connect individual scholars who aren’t already part of a center affiliated with SSRI. Affiliated centers and individual scholars share many needs, and as we expand our ability to serve those needs, some scholars will form new collaborations while others will form new connections with our existing affiliates.”
JERRY REITER, director of Data and Information Services (DIS), is looking forward to moving DIS from its current location at Erwin Mill to the new SSRI digs. “The goal of DIS is to help researchers at Duke with their database research needs,” Reiter said. “A big advantage to being on West Campus is that it will be more accessible to a large number of social sciences faculty, which will make it easier for us to offer our services to faculty.”

The DIS also offers its consulting services to Duke students and staff, and Reiter said the layout of the new space, which includes a large common area and lots of meeting rooms, will make it easier to connect with these groups. “The way it’s designed is going to facilitate interaction and that’s going to be a draw,” Reiter said. “People will want to come there because there will be opportunities for meeting space and seminars.” Reiter hopes all this activity will create a “buzz” that will attract potential clients. “We think that will help us do what we need to do, which is to serve the faculty and other researchers and students and make their database research better,” he said.

In addition to attracting new clients, the layout of the space will facilitate interaction among various groups doing work in the social sciences. Like others, Reiter envisions the team rooms being places where researchers can come together regularly to generate ideas. These ideas can turn into projects more efficiently with the support of the various SSRI resources located in the same space. For example, the Duke Initiative on Survey Methodology (DISM) could help design a survey to collect the kind of data needed for the project, and the DIS could help the group figure out how to store or analyze the data.

The DIS will be able to offer some new services in the new space. “We are excited about the “Connection Bar” where students and other researchers can come in and get assistance right away,” he said. “We also plan to have some secure data-access rooms so researchers can come to that particular room if they have confidential data that needs to be stored, or special protocols.”

“The space itself and the proximity to West Campus will give SSRI and DIS the opportunity to make a bigger impact on campus and improve the footprint of Duke in social sciences research, which then of course makes the world a better place, and that’s the whole goal.”

Database Research

The “winter garden” area will run from the political science department through to SSRI West. A great place to meet and mingle, catch up on e-mails, or work on a research project.
JAMES MOODY said moving SSRI to West Campus is a great idea. “It’s a real opportunity to get interdisciplinary social science to where the social sciences are — next to the business school, next to the law school, next to the public policy school,” he said. “It’s also great for students because it makes it that much easier for students to get there. It’s going to be a great move.”

Moody is director of the Duke Network Analysis Center (DNAC), which will have a physical presence in SSRI West. “The goal is to bring together people from all over the Triangle — whether from UNC, NC State, RTI — and help them design studies, identify computational resources necessary to do those studies, and put them in contact with graduate research assistants or other investigators to get that work done,” he said.

Networks are a tool that can be used to help visualize and study many different kinds of relationships. For example, in a friendship network, the nodes are people and the connections are friendships. In an organizational network, the nodes are organizations and the connections could be purchasing agreements or collaborations. “The purpose of network analysis is to identify patterns and associations related to how nodes, usually individuals, are connected to other nodes,” he said.

In the past, network analysis might involve hundreds of nodes, but today it commonly involves hundreds of thousands of nodes. The computation that’s required to analyze networks of that size is often beyond the scope of any individual social scientist’s expertise or equipment, and that’s where DNAC can help out. DNAC also can assist in designing the network to be analyzed. “The Network Center provides advice on how to do the analysis, how to collect the data, identify people of interest and what kinds of questions to ask them,” he said, adding that the Duke Initiative on Survey Methodology (DISM) is another great SSRI resource for getting help in what kinds of questions to ask.

One of the projects DNAC has assisted with looks at how leadership teams come together in systems to respond to forest fires in the mountain west; another project is identifying connections among physicians using Medicare data and 6 million patient charts.

He says the new space will allow DNAC to operate a little differently. “Our plan is to have a better walk-in or drop-in kind of activity,” he said.

Commenting on the open design of the new space, Moody said, “It’s going to be a great place for people to come and talk and work together. The whole purpose of the space is to create an opportunity for people to interact about ideas in the social sciences.”

Moody’s planning a project that he hopes will encourage even more interaction. His plan is to draw up a network using information about topics, terms, and collaboration patterns of each faculty member that will highlight similarities among faculty. “Such a map will make it simpler for investigators — and students — to find people working in areas they are interested in,” he said.
THE TRIANGLE Research Data Center (Triangle RDC or TCRDC) has been housed in the economics department at Duke University for more than 10 years, so the move to SSRI West will be a big change.

Gale Boyd, Director of the Triangle RDC said, “Moving to SSRI West will increase the RDC’s visibility and the campus’s awareness of it. I’ve always said that the data we provide access to is confidential, but the center itself should not be a secret.”

The Triangle RDC (the oldest such facility in the Southeast) is a partnership between the U.S. Census Bureau and Duke University in cooperation with the University of North Carolina System and Research Triangle Institute (RTI). Under this partnership, the Census Bureau allows qualified researchers to perform statistical analysis on selected internal non-public microdata from the Census Bureau’s economic and demographic censuses and surveys via two secure computer laboratories located at Duke and RTI.

The TCRDC is one of 12 sites in a network of Research Data Centers located around the U.S. Currently the center has a lab at the Research Triangle Institute (RTI). The lab has made it easier for researchers from NC State and UNC to use the center’s services. The hope is that moving to SSRI West will have the same impact on researchers at Duke, where scholars from not just economics but public policy, law, the Nicholas School — a broad range of people in the social and behavioral sciences here — will be encouraged to interact and collaborate on projects.

“If we can get people out of their usual offices and out of their usual buildings, and have them come to a place like the Triangle RDC as it will exist at SSRI West, we can hopefully initiate and encourage cross-disciplinary research and collaboration that might not have occurred otherwise,” said Boyd.

Being housed in Gross Hall, the Triangle RDC will have a physical space that is more in line with the spaces occupied by other RDCs. The new space at SSRI West will encourage researchers to connect to the interdisciplinary community as well as participate in annual conferences and seminars that will now be held in Gross Hall.

The kind of data the RDCs make available — confidential, individual-level data — is the kind of data that cutting-edge, empirical research in the social sciences demands. That’s where research in the social sciences is heading. Aggregate, public-use data is fine for some research projects; but the kinds of questions social scientists are asking more and more can only be answered by micro-level, confidential data.

“ The data we provide access to is confidential, but the center itself should not be a secret.”

— GALE BOYD
THE DUKE INITIATIVE on Survey Methodology (DISM), directed by D. Sunshine Hillygus, offers consulting services to Duke faculty, staff, and students on how to design and conduct surveys for research projects. "For instance," Hillygus said, "a graduate student who is interested in conducting an original survey but doesn't have a background in questionnaire design is able to use our services to be able to get feedback on how best to ask questions in order to test his or her expectations. It's often an iterative process where we meet with the faculty or student to figure out how we can best help, and then offer personalized advice."

She's looking forward to the move to SSRI West because she expects that once DISM is closer to faculty, staff, and students, there will be an increased demand for consultation and participation in DISM's workshops and conferences. She's also excited about the "Connection Bar" for researchers and students needing help with surveys.

"Undergraduates in particular are less inclined to come over to Erwin Mill," she said, "I think if there's easy access we can have greater participation in our programming activities and greater use of our consulting."

Hillygus is excited about the design of the new space. "The generation of new ideas and new research projects comes from sometimes a single conversation over coffee or the briefest interaction," she said. More interaction means more intellectual reward. "I don't run DISM just to do it," she said, "I hope to get something out of it and that's the intellectual component. It will be a huge benefit to be in a space that encourages interaction."

Hillygus enjoys designing surveys because it allows her to be involved in so many different fields of study, including the field of survey methodology itself. A survey generates data for the scientist who wants the information in the first place, but in addition, the process of designing the survey often provides Hillygus with an opportunity to make contributions to the field of survey methodology. "The new space will encourage interaction that will help to generate new research projects and ideas that will benefit both substantive knowledge and methodological knowledge about surveys," she said.

For example, she recently wrote a paper about methodology that was based on a single question. The survey was about politics, and the question was designed to measure if someone was a frequent survey taker — people called "professional" respondents by survey specialists. "We find that professional respondents are less interested in politics than other respondents on a variety of measures," she said, "and they are also more likely to skip questions and give a 'don't know' response."

Besides the location and the layout, there's something else that Hillygus is looking forward to at SSRI West. "I heard rumors there might be cookies in the afternoon," she said. "And I guarantee you that will draw people out. Great societal problems can be solved over chocolate chip cookies."

“Undergraduates in particular are less inclined to come over to SSRI currently,” she said, “and I think if there’s easy access we can have greater participation in our programing activities and greater use of our consulting.”

— D. SUNSHINE HILLYGUS
If you're coming from the political science department, just walk across the breezeway through the “winter garden.”

Swing by our suite of offices to see one of our staff members.

Not sure where you're going or just have a question? Stop by our reception area to get the scoop.

More offices for faculty and researchers. If you need a quiet place to do your work, let us know and the office is all yours! (well, not permanently)

Our consultants can help you gain access to restricted data, provide guidance on data confidentiality, and assist in the development of data management plans.

Our classroom will be the home of numerous interdisciplinary courses.

Computer giving you trouble? Need access to a program, software package or data set? Stop by and talk with the Data and Information Systems group.

If you're coming from the political science department, just walk across the breezeway through the “winter garden.”
In fall 2013 check your schedule to see if any of your classes or events will be held in SSRI West, so you can experience the new digs and all we have to offer.

Our state-of-the-art seminar room will be used to host our workshops, talks, colloquia, and more. After the event, feel free to mix and mingle in “The Connection.”

Plenty of team rooms allow you to work side by side with other researchers and get immediate feedback.

Have an idea to share? Go ahead — write on the glass walls!

Stop by the “Connection Bar” and chat with one of our experts to get the help you need with a thesis, research project, data question, and more.

Step up to our coffee bar, grab a cup of java or fresh baked cookie and mingle. This is where spontaneous ideas happen!

Wanting to do more work and less chatting? Feel free to take up some space in our booths.

Team rooms are a great space with glass walls, tables and chairs, whiteboards and display screens. Use these rooms to get your teams together and get the creative juices flowing!

Come on in! This entrance will take you through to our team rooms and collision area, known as the “The Connection.”
Duke Social Science Research Institute is moving west!

We're moving west!

No worries – we'll still be in our current space at Erwin Mill, but in fall 2013 you can also find us at our new digs in Gross Hall.

sites.duke.edu/ssriwest/