

MAPOR

The Newsletter of the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research -- Fall 2006

Changing opinion climates

Challenges for theory and research

By Ward Kay

MAPOR Conference Chair

The 2006 MAPOR conference promises to be a dynamic and vibrant collection of presentations and papers. We were blessed with a significant increase in paper proposals which has allowed us to present a program in which sessions will be remarkably cohesive. There will be 96 paper presentations, 14 poster presentations, and four panels during the two-day conference.

The 2006 MAPOR conference will be held once again the weekend before Thanksgiving (November 17-18) at the Radisson Hotel and Suites on E. Huron St. in Chicago. The hotel's location in the heart of the Magnificent Mile allows MAPOR attendees access to the finest shopping and dining district in the Midwest. In addition, the MAPOR parade (or as the locals call it, the Magnificent Mile Lights Festival) will once again take place on Michigan Avenue immediately following our conference. (Note to newcomers: the parade makes it difficult to get a cab or to get to the trains to make a late flight out).

The theme for this year's conference is "Changing Opinion Climates: Challenges for Theory and Research." Authors address this theme in a myriad of ways. There are papers that address new media such as blogs and their influence on framing issues or moving opinion. There are papers on differences of opinion formation in online communities as well as offline. Another session focuses on political participation in the 21st century. There is a session on Hurricane Katrina and its effects on data collection and public opinion. Another session examines religion and its effect on the opinion climate.

The 2006 mid-term elections might (or might not) show a changing opinion climate and the MAPOR conference – just 10 days after the elections – will provide a very topical review of the results. Susan Pinkus, of the Los Angeles Times Poll, will be the keynote speaker at MAPOR's Friday luncheon and will provide her insight on Election 2006 in general and on the campaign of California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in particular. After the luncheon, there

will be a panel on 2006 election results featuring pollsters conducting polls in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa.

Methodology will be a focus of this year's MAPOR conference. There are two panels and five paper sessions focusing on methodology. There is a methodological session in every time period. The two panels are "Challenges and Recommendations in Surveys of Physicians and Medical Professionals" and "Increasing Public Cooperation with Surveys." The session on surveys of physicians features panelists from the American Medical Association, the American Hospital Association and the American Dental Association as well as from RTI, International.

The "Increasing Public Cooperation with Surveys" panel is filled with survey experts, Tom Smith from NORC/University of Chicago, Paul Lavrakas from Nielsen Media Research and Bob Groves from the University of Michigan. The five methodological sessions focus on: questionnaire

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President's Column

Looking back on MAPOR's three decades

By Dietram A. Scheufele
 University of Wisconsin, Madison

At our annual conference in Chicago this November we will be looking back on 30 years of MAPOR – 30 years of theorizing and research in public opinion; 30 years of market and opinion researchers interacting with and learning from each other; and 30 years of new graduate students getting to know the field of public opinion research by attending their first MAPOR conference the weekend before Thanksgiving.

MAPOR has been one of the few conferences I have attended regularly over the years, even when I did not live in the Midwest. And every year we have attendees from all over the country and often even from abroad. Without a doubt you will overhear someone talking about MAPOR being “a state of mind” during a paper session or over a drink during our cocktail reception this year. And it is true, over the last 30 years MAPOR has developed into a conference that is as much about meeting friends and seeing familiar faces as it is about hearing about and presenting innovative and interesting research.

For the 2006 conference, Ward Kay and John Loft have put together one of our most expansive

conference programs ever with four consecutive sessions Friday and Saturday. They have worked hard to get papers reviewed over the summer, to find discussants and moderators for sessions, and to put together a very stimulating set of paper sessions and panels. When you see them in Chicago in November, make sure that you thank them personally for their hard work. Ward Kay's column in this newsletter has more information on the conference program and logistics. But let me highlight two events in particular.

First, please make sure that you register for the awards luncheon along with your regular conference registration. During the luncheon, Rick Perloff will present awards to the winners and runners-up of the annual MAPOR Fellows Student Paper Competition. We will also announce the newest MAPOR Fellow during the luncheon.

The banquet will also feature our keynote speaker at this year's conference: Susan Pinkus, Director of Polling for the Los Angeles Times. Susan Pinkus has directed the LA Times Poll for almost a decade now and will share some of her insights on the 2006 gubernatorial

race in California. The LA Times Poll has been conducting surveys for publication in the newspaper for more than 20 years, starting as a part-time experiment, expanding to a three person full-time department in 1980 and finally computerizing and expanding to its present size and configuration in 1984. The LA Times Poll has conducted more than 400 surveys in its history, including exit polls of every presidential and California gubernatorial election during that time.

The second event I would like to draw your attention to is our Pedagogy Hour with John Stevenson, Associate Director of the University of Wisconsin Survey Center (UWSC). At UWSC, John Stevenson is responsible for managing the overall operation of the Center's projects. This includes management of the yearly \$3-4 million dollar budget, overall supervision of 30 full-time and 150-200 part-time staff members, business development, project coordination, budgetary monitoring, staff recruitment and development, and quality control assurance. John will share some of UWSC's recent efforts and

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Challenges

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design; survey data quality; survey accuracy and standards; nonresponse; and nonresponse bias.

The fourth panel, which will close the MAPOR conference, is a look at MAPOR's role in the public opinion community. MAPOR is more than 30 years old and a panel of MAPOR luminaries will reflect on its past, present, and future.

In the attached preliminary program you will find all the ses-

sions and papers listed. There is sure to be a series of sessions that will appeal to anyone who has read this far into the article. So please, register for the conference and don't forget to register for the luncheon which in addition to Susan Pinkus, features the announcement of the MAPOR Fellows' Student Paper winners and the announcement of new MAPOR Fellow.

The conference is held at the Radisson Hotel & Suites in downtown Chicago <http://www.radisson.com/chicagoil>.

The room rates are again \$157 for a single and \$177 for a double. To receive the conference rate, make sure that you mention MAPOR when you make your reservation. All hotel reservations must be made by October 31, 2006. You should try to book as soon as possible, however, because once we oversell our room block, the Radisson may increase the room rate. Please contact the Radisson directly at: (312) 787-2900.

Included with the MAPOR newsletter are candidate biographies and ballots for this year's president-elect and conference co-chair elections. Please mail the ballots to:

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You also may e-mail your votes to:

scheufele@wisc.edu

Ballots should be postmarked (or e-mailed) by Nov. 3, 2006.

President's Column . . .

methodological experiments to deal with the challenges that telephone surveys face in the age of cell phones and decreasing response rates.

As always, MAPOR is trying to keep the costs for conference attendees as low as possible. We have negotiated with the hotel to keep room rates even below what you would pay if you registered for the government rate. And if we fill our block of rooms, the Radisson will not charge us extra for the use of their meeting rooms. But that also means that we do rely on MAPORites to stay at the Radisson and make sure that they take advantage of the MAPOR rate. So please register, and register early.

Finally, I would like to thank a number of people who have made my tenure as president a lot easier. Steve Everett has maintained our web site (www.mapor.org) on his server for a long time now and without any cost to MAPOR. He has also spearheaded our very successful fund-raising campaigns in the past few years, and without his help we would not have been able to subsidize student registration and banquet costs for all attendees as much as we did.

I would also like to acknowledge John Loft's and RTI's support for our annual spring board meeting. RTI has kindly offered to let us use their offices and meeting rooms for the past few years, which

has helped us tremendously in planning the meetings and making the president's life much easier.

Last but not least, thanks to the MAPOR Board who have all worked very hard this past year to put together panels, help with various aspects of conference planning, and think about new directions for MAPOR in the next 30 years. This includes David Tewksbury (President Elect), Doug Blanks Hindman (Past President), H. Allen White (Secretary-Treasurer), Ward Kay (Conference Chair), John Loft (Conference Co-Chair), and the other members of the MAPOR Board, Bob Belli, Dominique Brossard, Tudor Vlad, and Weiwu Zhang.

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