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New Labor Dynamics Institute to shed light on labor market

By Mary Catt | October 5, 2011

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The new Labor Dynamics Institute at the ILR School will create and make accessible new data on the dynamics of labor markets.

Its director is John Abowd, the Edmund Ezra Day Professor of Economics and a professor of information science. Its executive director is economist Lars Vilhuber, senior research associate of the Cornell Department of Economics.

"We work with research networks and statistical agencies, developing appropriate statistics to inform policymakers, researchers and simply people seeking knowledge," Vilhuber said. "We emphasize and meet the requirements of stakeholders -- users as well as providers -- balancing the utility of the data with the confidentiality of the people and businesses whose activities the data describe."

“One of the main activities will be to develop new data products that will help people understand how local labor markets work,” Abowd said.

The education of graduate students is an integral part of the Labor Dynamics Institute mission. Funded by grants, graduate students selected from economics, statistics, information science and other social sciences will work on interdisciplinary projects on data creation, data protection and data usage methodologies. Abowd and Vilhuber have worked with the Census Bureau for more than a decade. Their work, in collaboration with scientists at the Census Bureau and at other universities, has led to increased access to census data. This in turn will improve the analysis of patterns and trends in local labor markets, they said, and lead to better public policy.

Institute work by scholars will also serve practitioners in identifying, for instance, how many people are being hired and fired in local labor markets, they said.

“The degree to which we can drill down demographically has been dramatically improved by the adoption of new statistical methods and confidentiality protections,” Abowd said. “The fruits of these efforts can be greatly multiplied by the new institute’s work.”

The Labor Dynamics Institute will work on several projects led by Abowd and Vilhuber. Some of the projects are based at Cornell’s Virtual Research Data Center, now a part of the Labor Dynamics Institute. They include the Synthetic Data Server providing researchers early access to new census data and the Social Science Gateway to TeraGrid, which allows researchers to perform preparatory data and analysis work prior to harnessing the computational power of national supercomputing resources.

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