

World-historical Dataverse: Designing collaborative inquiry on centuries of global human patterns

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This is to solicit expressions of interest from Pitt faculty members in the design of long-term, world-wide databases combining economic, social, demographic, environmental and health variables. We are constructing a website (described at bottom) and we seek participants for a year-long, speculative seminar to discuss the possibilities.

The current wave of globalization has researchers working up data and theories on global change in every field, trying to project future change. Of course the actual data behind these projections, to the extent that they exist, are about the past. In earth sciences and environmental studies, serious investment in research has brought dramatic advances in knowledge about local and global changes over centuries and millennia. Social scientists, in contrast, are very short on comparable data on global patterns over any length of time. Their historical data are contained within national and local boxes that are distributed very unevenly across the globe, and social-science theory tends to assume each localized society has been distinctive rather than share global characteristics.

We invite you to join us in forming a small group of researchers to discuss the feasibility of designing a world-historical dataverse (i.e., the universe of world-historical data) that might ultimately provide perhaps five centuries of comparable data—worldwide—on aspects of commerce, demography, social relations, environment, and health conditions. We seek historians, economists, sociologists, and the like as specialists in these data. But we also seek geographers, earth scientists, information scientists, and public health specialists, hoping they will be able to share experience in creating analogous databases.

We plan to hold sessions about once a month in Spring 2009 and Fall 2009.

For those interested in further information or in joining this group, please contact one or both of us at the e-mail addresses above. We will respond with additional details, including the tentative list of seminars and topics.

WORLD-HISTORICAL DATAVERSE www.dataverse.pitt.edu

The World-Historical Dataverse—supported by Arts & Sciences, the Office of the Provost, and the University Library System—is an open-source project for archiving, transforming, and estimating world-historical data, to provide a consistent basis for analyzing long-term trends at the global level. It is housed at the World History Center at the University of Pittsburgh. It emphasizes quantitative variables in the social sciences, environmental and health studies, and is intended to support analysis of their interaction at levels from the local to the global. (It is expected that qualitative data will be linked to the quantitative core of the project.) Collaborators everywhere are encouraged to: 1) submit data to the archive, 2) review the range of data available via the portal and the archive, 3) integrate available data into new datasets, and 4) join in the work of designing a master dataset or Global Dataverse that would permit consistent world-historical analysis.