

Social dynamics of scientific collaborations

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Society currently faces profound social and environmental challenges that must be met to secure a sustainable future for humanity. A major challenge in achieving this goal is discovering how best to synthesize important findings and ideas from many disciplines and use them to produce scientifically informed social and environmental policy.

This task is not easy. Different disciplines use different theories and methods, and scientists and policy makers rarely work together. New types of research centers are needed, as are new ways of organizing collaborations between scientists and between scientists and policy makers.

New research by John Parker of Barrett, The Honors College at Arizona State University and Edward Hackett of ASU's School of [Human Evolution](#) and Social Change works to identify the specific types of research environments and social interactions that facilitate success in these collaborations.

Parker presented the team's analysis of factors that facilitate cross-disciplinary collaborations between scientists and policy makers today (Feb. 18), at the 2013 annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. His talk was titled "Ecology Transformed: NCEAS and Organizing for Synthesis."

Parker and Hackett are using novel, state-of-the-art research instruments known as "sociometric sensors" in their investigation. These are wearable computers that record data about how scientists and policy

makers interact with each other, including movement, vocal tones, interruptions, volume and other conversational nuances.

They will use these sensors to study scientists working on real problems at several research centers around the world with the aim of identify patterns of [social interaction](#) that are best related to collaborative success. Sensor data will also be integrated with interviews, surveys and observations of the scientists.

Hackett and Parker hope that the groundwork they build in these studies will pave the way for future research on the same topic and allow for the creation of new types of research centers capable of meeting the challenges of the future. Their work also has implications for ASU's vision as The New American University.

"What we are doing," Parker said, "is related to what ASU is trying to do on a larger scale. By embedding engagement into activities, the university hopes to positively impact the social and environmental development of individuals and the community as a whole."

Provided by Arizona State University

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