



From the Director's Desk: Keeping

I am an engineer and a researcher, and so the culture around me demands innovation. What will I do that's new? What will I offer today...next class...next project? I'm in a Western culture that emphasizes continuous self-improvement, so I aspire to evolve not only in my products, but also in myself. Our aspirations are heavily centered around change: "We want students who will make a difference."

The question we rarely ask is "What do I want to keep?" We can see that "keeping" instinct as soon as we encounter the actual people who might be affected by our work. Sure, change is OK, but please let me keep my rhythm, my convenience, my independence. But I think of all the words that imply keeping—retention, preservation, and (horrors!) maintenance—and I'd never put them in a research proposal.

Let me suggest some different words: Value. Treasure. Embrace. For us humans, keeping what we value – that is, conservation – is stronger than the drive for innovation. Marketers know this, and researchers should too. How does innovation enable people to keep what they cherish? Answering that question is the core of CACHE's mission. I'm bad at it. Evolution versus conservation feels like a swinging pendulum for me, rather than trees growing entwined. Keep talking.

Best, Tami

CACHE Affiliates Dig Into Chicago Power Usage

In most areas of the world, electricity is a fundamental part of daily life. It heats homes, cycles clean air through buildings, and lights up almost everything we see. But despite its universality, we actually know very little about how people consume electricity in their homes.

For scientists who study energy systems, residential energy efficiency, and the health impacts of indoor spaces, the methods for learning about people's electricity use are limited. Behavior surveys and utility bills can show consumption trends, but aren't feasible on scales larger than a neighborhood or two.

To reveal broad behavior trends that drive residential electricity use, researchers at the University of Illinois are turning to smart-meter electricity data from the ComEd utility in northern Illinois.

It's a huge amount of highly-specific data, and before researchers can hope to draw conclusions from it, they need to understand the landscape the data presents. Ashlynn Stillwell, Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Illinois, Paul Francisco, Senior Research Engineer at the Illinois Applied Research Institute, and Lucas Djehdian, a Civil Engineering Master's student, took on the challenge.



[Read more about this collaborative research project >>>](#)

CACHE is supported in its mission by the College of Engineering, the Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering (CEE) at Illinois, and the Institute for Sustainability, Energy, and Environment (iSEE) at Illinois.