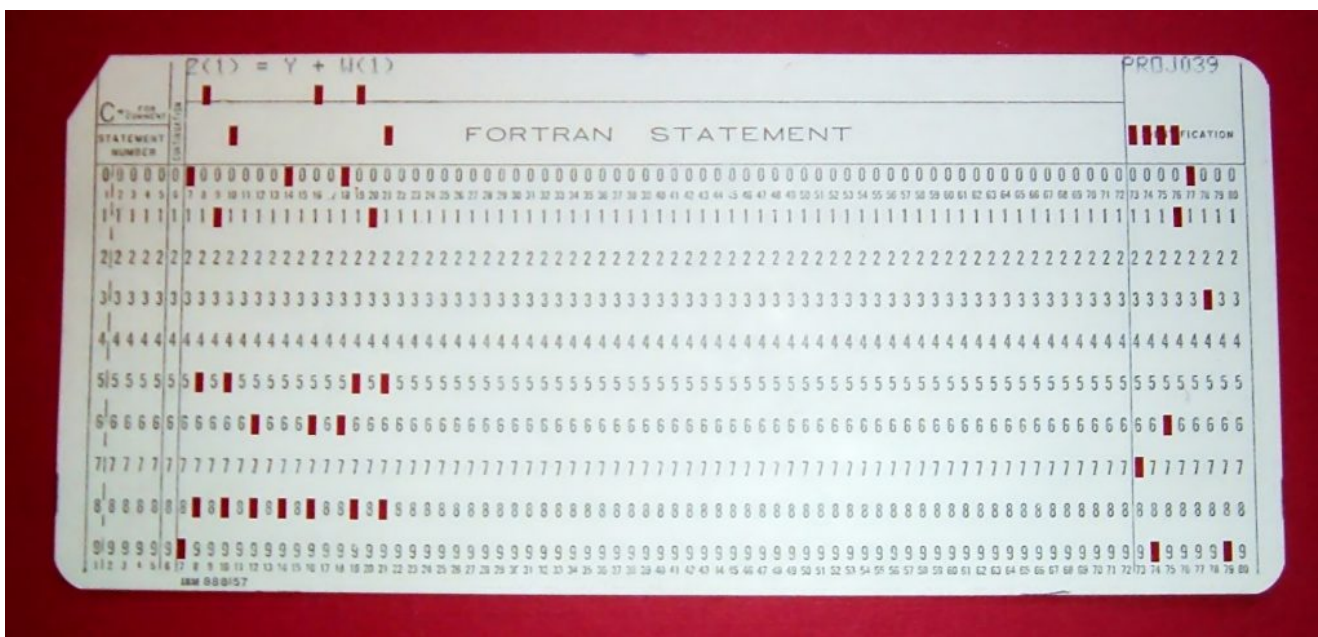


# Data, Key Punches, Blogging and the Upstate Economy



Fifty years ago, as a research assistant in graduate school at Syracuse University, I did some quantitative research for a professor on the effect of various factors on state policy outputs.



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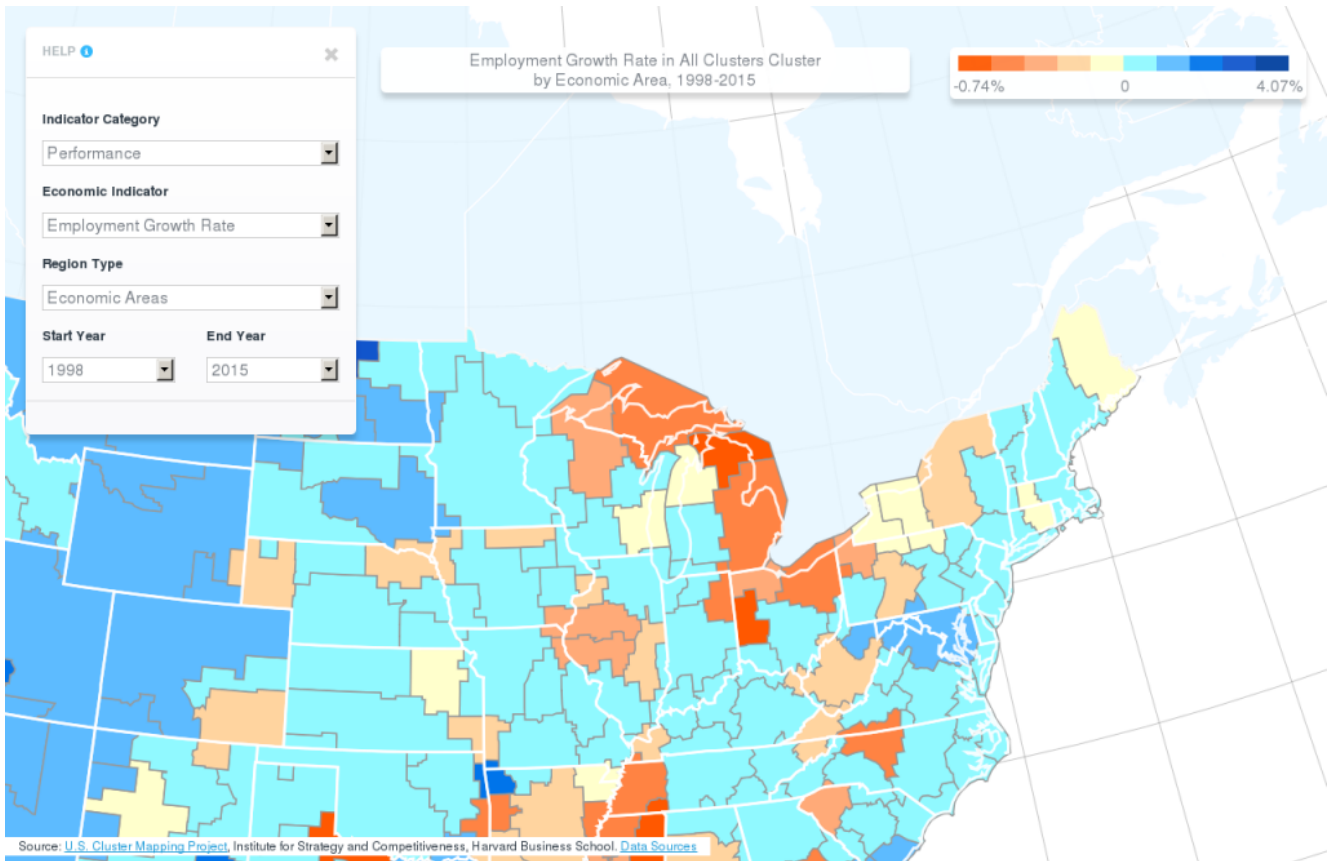
Doing the work required me find data in books in the university library and to go to a room in the university computer center, like the one in the illustration on the right, to put the data on cards using a key punch. Once the cards were punched, I gave the deck of cards to a member of the university's computer staff, who then put them in a card reader connected to a computer. On the computer, a statistical analysis program – SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), provided the tools I needed to analyze my data. Later, I would return to collect sheets of paper on which the results were printed.

The process was slow and cumbersome, involving hours of work to collect, input and analyze data. Today, that data can be collected and analyzed in minutes on a laptop computer. With the internet, I no longer have to comb through books from a specialized library, and with a personal computer, I no longer have to go to a central place to analyze data.

Information sharing is much easier, too. In the past, if I wanted to share research data, I would have to find an institution that was willing to publish it – a process that sometimes required researchers to share in the cost of publication. Today, the internet offers the possibility to reach readers directly. Over the past two years, I've been able to publish more than two dozen research notes on my blog, reaching thousands of readers.

On this blog, I've written about data related to significant policy issues that face New York, particularly upstate New York. As a long-time upstate resident, I am aware that much of the region, particularly those areas that were historically dependent on manufacturing, faces significant challenges in making it possible for residents to find good jobs that pay well.

While upstate New York faces the same challenges as the rest of the rust belt, its metropolitan areas differ from those in other rust belt places, such as Michigan and Ohio, because the impact of the loss of manufacturing has been less severe here. Metropolitan areas like Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse continue to have relatively affluent suburban populations, and overall have median household incomes that are near the national average. Paradoxically, upstate central cities have among the highest poverty rates in the region, and several of the cities face fiscal distress. The map, below, shows employment growth rates from 1998 to 2015 for economic regions in the Northeast and Midwest. The weakest rates in the region are on a belt along the southern shores of the Great Lakes running from Wisconsin to Ohio. Although Western and Central New York have done less well than much of the country, they have performed better than much of the Midwest.



Through my analyses, I've tried to strengthen policy discussions that focus on the decline of upstate cities and rust belt metropolitan areas, in order to avoid errors such as attributing most of the region's decline to relatively high taxation levels, and misguided attempts to revive regional economies that create too much taxpayer risk by spending hundreds of billions of dollars to attract high technology businesses. I've looked at the paradox of thriving suburbs and declining cities in New York's metropolitan areas, and the growth of racial segregation upstate. I've also provided data to help readers understand the real reasons why city schools are "failing."

I've been happy to see that some of my pieces have been seen by a relatively large number of people. Among the most

popular have been:

[The Decline of Manufacturing in New York and the Rust Belt](#), which has had more than 3,000 views.

[As Private Sector Employee Incomes Stagnate, Local Government Workers Prosper](#), with more than 2,300 views.

[New York's Ineffective Business Tax Incentives](#), with 1,600 views.

[New York's "Failing Schools" – The Wrong Diagnosis and a Misguided Solution](#), with 1,300 views, and

[The Crisis of Poverty in Upstate New York Cities](#), with more than 1,000 views.

In the coming year, I'll be a [Richard P. Nation research fellow the Rockefeller Institute at the University of Albany](#). The fellowship will afford me the ability to work with other researchers on critical issues. I also hope to work with the Institute's staff to develop forums to discuss some of these issues and policies. As a result, in the coming year, some of my research will be published on the Institute's blog, or as research publications. In those cases, I'll be sure to provide links to that work on this blog.

In the past two years, much of the impetus for my work has come from accounts that I have read in various places on the internet, such as a story that appeared in the New York Times, ["Spike Nation: Cheap, unpredictable and hard to regulate, synthetic marijuana has emergency responders scrambling to save lives."](#), which contained the statement, "Syracuse is one of the poorest cities in America – more than a third of the people here live below the poverty line." Having lived in Syracuse in the 1960's and 1970's, I was aware that when I lived there, that Syracuse was not one of the poorest cities in America. The city had a mix of relatively poor and well-off areas. That sparked my interest into researching what had

happened to upstate metropolitan areas after I left Syracuse in 1971, and led to several pieces on this blog.

Other pieces on this blog came from readers who asked questions about the proposed increase in the minimum wage, and about labor participation rates in upstate areas. I hope that readers of this blog will continue to ask questions and offer their perspectives. I may be contacted at [john.bacheller@policybynumbers.com](mailto:john.bacheller@policybynumbers.com).

In the coming year, I plan to continue to look at labor participation and employment in New York State with a focus on disparities between cities and suburbs. I'm also collecting data on city and town tax and revenue burdens and spending patterns to understand how they differ, and researching New York's [Regional Economic Development Council](#) initiative to better assess strengths and weaknesses. I also hope to take a look at some more data about student performance in New York schools. I expect to publish findings via the Rockefeller Institute and on this blog in the coming months.

*Illustrations are from Wikipedia. Map is from: [U.S. Cluster Mapping Project](#), Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness, Harvard Business School.*  
<http://www.clustermapping.us/region>