

History of the Section on Survey Research Methods

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In June 1977 the American Statistical Association (ASA) membership approved the establishment of a Section on Survey Research Methods, effective January 1, 1978, with approximately 2,300 ASA members voting to affiliate with the new section. Three and one-half years earlier at its December 1973 business meeting in New York, the Social

Statistics Section had voted to organize a Subsection on Survey Research Methods.

For several years researchers with strong interests in academic research centers had been meeting informally at ASA annual meetings (first in Detroit in 1970 with the initiative of Leslie Kish) to discuss problems and expectations. Some Social Statistics Section program sessions had been organized on topics of interest to this informal group. The rapid growth in survey research, the increase in the number of university-based centers, and the concerns of

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social scientists about the quality of survey data prompted the motion to organize a subsection devoted to methodological aspects of survey research. The history of the subsection is the early history of the section.

In 1974 the ASA constitution contained no procedure for the establishment of subsections. That may explain in part the speed with which the subsection was formed. Early in the year the proposal for the establishment of the subsection within the Social Statistics Section was approved by the Committee on Committees, in May the Board of Directors also approved the proposal, and in June the ASA membership voted their approval with about 2,000 reporting interest in joining the subsection.

The subsection held its first business meeting at the August ASA annual meeting in St. Louis. Officers, appointed pro tem by the chair of the Social Statistics Section, were approved to serve until January 1, 1976.

When the ASA board reviewed the subsection charter in January 1975, questions were raised: Why place the group with *social* instead of *business and economic* statistics? Why focus on social surveys instead of surveys in general? Why subsection rather than section status? The motion that approved the subsection charter stated "that the Charter be accepted and that it be reexamined by the Subsection within two years with a recommendation to the Board on the direction of the Subsection and examination of status as a Section" (*Amstat News*, 1975, No. 20, p. 1).

At the August 1975 business meeting of the subsection, a committee composed of Thomas B. Jabine, Martin R. Frankel, and Edward Schillmoeller was appointed to consider the questions raised by the board and to make recommendations to the subsection officers and membership. In 1976 the subsection filed a petition requesting section status, which met with the approval of the Committee on Committees and the Board of Directors at its August meeting. The proposal was approved by the ASA membership in June 1977.

While it was a subsection, the survey interest group had no difficulty in finding opportunities to serve the Association and the statistical profession. Early in 1973 ASA, under a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF), organized a conference to discuss problems of surveys of human populations. Participants were distinguished social scientists and survey methodologists. Subsequently, ASA submitted to the NSF a proposal for a two-year project called Surveys of Human Populations: Methodological and Professional Standards. When the initial proposal was rejected, the subsection was given the task of preparing a revised proposal.

In June 1975 ASA announced that the NSF had awarded a grant of \$95,100 in support of a project named Assessment of Survey Practices and Data Quality in Scientific Survey of Human Populations. The project, with a grant period from July 1, 1975, to December 31, 1976, was a developmental and feasibility study. Barbara Bailar and Michael Lanphier were codirectors of the undertaking. A proposal to continue the research with a full study based on the feasibility experience was not funded.

In 1978 ASA published a report of the pilot project entitled "Development of Survey Methods to Assess Survey Practices." The demand for copies soon exhausted the sup-

ply. In 1984 the NSF provided support to reprint the report.

In 1976 Robert Ferber suggested to Subsection Chair Frankel that the subsection undertake the preparation of a brochure called "What Is A Survey?" With the consent of the subsection officers, Frankel appointed a project committee of Ferber (chair), Paul Sheatsley, Anthony Turner, and Joseph Waksberg. Early in 1980 ASA published 20,000 copies of the brochure. By November there was a second printing of 50,000 copies. By 1983 translations into Spanish, Chinese, and Greek had been completed and other translations were planned.

After receiving requests for several surveys of the ASA membership, at its May 1976 meeting the board stated that any questionnaire proposed for distribution to the ASA membership was to undergo professional review and only board-approved surveys of the membership were to be conducted. The subsection was requested to provide the professional review, and Frankel appointed Bailar, Tore Dalenius, and Wray Smith to provide it.

Recognizing that there might be repeated requests for reviews of proposed surveys, in 1977 Subsection Chair Bailar recommended a continuing committee with authorization to review all aspects of any proposed survey of ASA members. A committee composed of Eugene Erickson (chair), Kent Marquis, and Naomi Rothwell prepared "Guidelines for Reviewing ASA Surveys," which was published in *Amstat News* (1978, No. 47, p. 6), and the board ruled that any questionnaire sent to ASA members must first be reviewed by the section.

At the February 1982 meeting of the ASA Board of Directors, the board's Executive Committee recommended and the board agreed that the continuing committee of the section be made an ASA continuing committee.

During 1977 Jabine chaired a Committee on Transition from subsection to section status. Earle Gerson and Paul Glick drafted the section's charter. Officers for 1978 were proposed by the subsection, approved by the board, and appointed by ASA President Kish. The chair and chair-elect had been elected to those offices by subsection members in June 1977.

On January 1, 1978, the section entered its first year with working committees and activities that originated while it was a subsection of the Social Statistics Section. As stated in its charter, the interests of the section encompass all areas in which survey research methodology is used. The functions of the section include the advancement of knowledge and research in survey methodology and the participation of its members in affairs of the section and the association.

At its February meeting the board approved the section's request for separate proceedings volumes beginning with the 1978 edition and continuing annually. Previously, papers presented at annual meetings were included in the proceedings of the Social Statistics Section.

In addition to organizing program sessions for annual meetings, the section has presented tutorials and workshops. It has cooperated with other professional organizations in their program presentations and has sponsored or cosponsored conferences and symposia of national and international scope. The following are some highlights of section activities to share research and to advance knowledge in

survey methodology.

- At the 1979 spring meeting of the North Central Region of the American Sociological Association in Dayton, Ohio, Warren Mitofsky conducted a workshop on telephone surveys.

- An International Symposium on Survey Sampling, sponsored by the ASA Ottawa Chapter, the Section on Survey Research Methods, Statistics Canada, and Carleton University, was held in May 1980 in Ottawa. Proceedings, edited by D. Kewski, R. Platek, and J. N. K. Rao, were published as *Current Topics in Survey Sampling* by Academic Press in 1981.

- At the 1980 ASA annual meeting in Houston, a tutorial, Variance Estimation for Complex Sample Surveys, was presented by Kirk Wolter and David Chapman. A workshop called Improving Quality of Presentations was organized by Maria Gonzalez.

- Concerned about the widespread continuing use of unscientific public polls and surveys, the section asked ASA to address flagrant abuses of sound statistical data-collection procedures. In response, at its February 1981 meeting the board authorized the appointment of an ad hoc committee to assess ways in which ASA might move to reduce the incidence of invalid or otherwise indefensible public surveys.

- In 1981 the section sponsored two sessions at regional meetings: the spring meeting of the Biometric Society (East North America Region) in Richmond, Virginia, and the April meeting of the North Central Region of the American Sociological Association in Cleveland, Ohio. In 1982 joint sessions were organized with the American Public Health Association and the Biometric Society (West North America Region).

- Analysis of Categorical Data From Complex Samples was the name of a tutorial conducted by J. Richard Landis and James M. Lepkowski at the 1983 ASA meeting in Toronto and again at the 1984 ASA meeting in Philadelphia.

- A workshop on questionnaire design was presented by Allen Gower and Ida Trachtenberg at the 1985 ASA annual meeting in Las Vegas.

- With the dedicated services of Editor J. Sedransk and seven associate editors, the section sponsored a special Applications section, with nine articles on the general topic of nonsampling errors of surveys and censuses, in the June 1986 issue of the *Journal of the American Statistical Association*.

- With U.S. Census Bureau funding, in 1986 the section and the Social Science Research Council formed a working group to advise on technical aspects of the Survey of Income and Program Participation.

- A symposium on panel surveys sponsored by the section and the International Association of Survey Statisticians was organized by Daniel Kasprzyk (chair), Greg Duncan, and M. P. Singh. It convened in Washington, D.C., in November 1986. *Panel Surveys*, a volume of invited papers edited by the organizing committee and Graham Kalton, was published by John Wiley in 1989.

- A short course and two tutorials were arranged for the 1987 ASA meeting in San Francisco: Statistical Analysis

With Missing Data, taught by Roderick J. A. Little and Donald B. Rubin; Estimating Subnational Populations, taught by Donald Starsinic and Paul Levy; and Analysis of Categorical Data From Complex Samples, taught by Robert E. Fay.

- A conference on telephone survey methodology sponsored by ASA (represented by the section), the American Association for Public Opinion Research, and the International Association of Survey Statisticians was held in Charlotte, North Carolina, in November 1987. The organizing committee of Robert Groves, (chair), Paul Biemer, Lars Lyberg, James Massey, William Nicholls II, and Waksberg also served as editors of a volume of invited papers, *Telephone Survey Methodology*, published by John Wiley in 1988.

- Two tutorials were organized for the 1988 ASA meeting in New Orleans: Designs for Observational Studies, taught by Kish, and Variance Estimation in Sample Surveys, taught by Keith Rust.

- The Section on Survey Research Methods, the Social Statistics Section, and the Business and Economic Statistics Section sponsored the 1989 ASA winter conference in San Diego, California.

- Activities for the 1989 sesquicentennial meeting in Washington, D.C., included a tutorial, Weighting Survey Data, directed by Brenda G. Cox, and a special session with two invited papers—"The History and Development of Survey Research Methods and Data Collection Technology," by Stephen E. Fienberg and Judith M. Tanur, and "The History and Development of the Theoretical Foundations of Survey Based Estimation and Statistical Analysis," by Rao.

The subsection and section officers are presented in Table 1.

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Table 1. Officers of the Subsection and Section on Survey Research Methods

Year	Chair	Vice chair ^a / Secretary- treasurer ^b
Subsection		
1974-1975	Michael Lanphier	Barbara Ballar
1976	Martin R. Frankel	Irene Hess
1977	Barbara Ballar	David Bayless
Section		
1978	Irene Hess	Leo Reader
1979	David Bayless	Barbara Boyes
1980	Joseph Sedransk	Barbara Boyes
1981	Daniel Horvitz	Judith Lessler
1982	Norman Bradburn	Judith Lessler
1983	Jacob Feldman	Judith Lessler
1984	Benjamin King, Jr.	Judith Lessler
1985	Charles Jones	Susan Miskura
1986	Graham Kalton	Susan Miskura
1987	Joseph Waksberg	Brenda G. Cox
1988	Monroe Sirken	Brenda G. Cox
1989	Wayne Fuller	Jane Bergsten
1990	Wesley Schaible	Jane Bergsten

^aSubsection.

^bSection.