

Minutes: Government Statistics Section December 1st, 2008

Attended:

Natalia Verbitsky	Carol House	Robert Lussier
Bill Wong	Carolee Bush	Lisa Blumerman
Sonya Vartivarian	John Dixon	Steve Cohen
Sunhgee Lee (by phone)	Lester Curtin	Monica Clark (ASA)
Steve Pierson (ASA)	Ron Wasserstein (ASA)	

Prior to the start of the formal meeting, there was an informal discussion with Ron Wasserstein. Ron remarked that he was just beginning the process of understanding government statistics and mentioned an upcoming meeting with the Interagency Council on Statistics Policy (ICSP) and the ASA Board of Directors. One topic to be considered will be the lack of candidates to enter the profession as new government statisticians. He was interested as he thought this was more than just a government problem. He mentioned the possibility of follow up discussion at JSM and also including biostatistics, biopharm, and survey methods. Some discussion followed on pay issues, skill sets needed, and the possible negative perception of working for the government among academically trained candidates. The problem of citizenship status was mentioned along with the fact that around ½ of US statistics degrees go to non-citizens.

Ron took the opportunity to ask the GSS members about the creation of new sections in ASA. There are now 24 section with the 2 new sections recently added. The new sections are (1) Data learning and data mining and (2) Statistical programming. The reason for the new sections is the recent change in the ASA constitution that eliminated subsection membership. One problem this creates is in the allocation of invited sessions at the JSM: most of the flexibility in session allocation is now gone. Several discussion points: Many of the current sections have relatively few members, many ASA members have no sections at all, many people choose only 1 section, one reason to be in a section(s) is to maintain a network of individuals with similar interests, sections are free for three years. Questions raised: do new sections create a loss of revenue, do people know what sections do, and are members needs being met by a section. It was recommended that there should be an article in AMSTAT news on reasons and advantages to join a section. There is an ASA data base on membership with history data for the last years but at the current time the data base is somewhat limited and used for monitoring renewal behavior.

It is not clear if the data base could be used to see if new sections were pulling members from other sections. For a possible AMSTAT news article, it was mentioned that personal stories of the benefits of section membership could be sought from current

section members. Also, for the 2010 JSM there could be something analogous to a “Section Fair”.

This led to a brief discussion of the upcoming JSM schedule. Meetings are set through 2014: Vancouver (2010), Miami (2011), San Diego (2012), Montreal (2013) and Boston (2014). Some future considerations: to view the selection as a desirable destination for members, to consider less expensive cities, to consider cooler climates, to consider pairs of cities and negotiate better cost structures, and the possibility of a Winter meeting. There will be an ASA survey to come out shortly looking for ASA member input and opinion.

The GSS meeting was then formally opened with a discussion of past minutes and the budget. Budget update material was circulated. With the income from ICES-III (initial seed money plus a small profit) the GSS budget is in very good condition with an ending year balance of \$19,221.07. Some points discussed concerning the budget: Corporate sponsorship update, Student awards problem (GSS paid all instead of part) but Carol will straighten out, and money for Herriott award has been correctly allocated.

Action: Carol

For the 2009 budget to be submitted by Dec 31st (Actually due by October 1st): ICES IV planning may require a \$2,000 placeholder, this will be put in the 2009 budget projection.

Action: Randy

For the upcoming JSM sessions: 3 proposals for invited session have been received. Proposed sessions that do not get designated as Invited session may be sent in as topic contributed, these will be due Feb 1. The SS/SMRS/GSS (Social, Survey and Government) student paper award competition is due by Dec 19th – this is listed on the GSS web page.

At the next JSM, the GSS will sponsor a poster competition. This will be announced in the December newsletter. It is hoped that the GSS posters can be grouped together, preferably on Monday so judging can be made before the GSS business meeting and the winners can be announced on Tuesday business meeting. If not, some early review of posters may be necessary. If possible, it is desirable to display the winning posters at the GSS business meeting. Judging will be done by a committee of 3 – past, current, and next program chairs. There is a need to publicize the competition, preferably in AMSTAT news.

Action: Sunghee and Sonya

Potential Roundtables for the next JSM: the use of administrative records (lunch), The Impact of disasters, (a Coffee, maybe with survey research), Data sharing and the NORC data enclave.

Action: Lisa

ICES IV planning and the need for some sort of permanent structure was the next agenda item. John Eltinge had set up three committees for the past planning exercise. As this is

an international meeting, the next meeting was considered to be held in Europe. However, a certain level of funding would be required from the European members and this did not seem feasible. Current thinking is the 2012 ICES will be held in either Philadelphia, Toronto, Montreal, or maybe Boston. Some discussion centered on the desire to have GSS represented on any long term planning committee. Carol will be our representative.

Action: Carol

Steve Pierson was introduced as the ASA Director of science policy. His role is to promote the use of statistics (and data) in U.S. policy making. ASA has already supported budget requests for NCHS and the Census. It was noted that there was a proposal by Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-NY (HR 1254) to have the Census Bureau designated as an independent agency, not in the Commerce department.

In the effort to educate and inform Congress about Federal statistics agencies, there is a need to develop short summaries or “bullets” on particular matters that may be of particular interest to members of Congress. Steve had 3 examples and requested GSS assistance on producing these types of documents to stress the importance of the Federal statistical system. After some discussion of possibilities, it was decided to focus on education (Tanya and Sonya) and agriculture (Carol) and to bring this back for discussion in the March 2009 GSS meeting.

Action: Tanya, Sonya and Carol

Upcoming Awards (please consider candidates)

Student paper – due by 12/19. on website

Wray Jackson Smith (with WSS)

Roger Herriott - Frank Potter represents GSS, nominations due by April 1st

Pat Doyle - GSS committee of three: past chair, current chair, and chair-elect

Jean Griffith (GSS primary with Stephanie and Carolee on selection committee)

ASA will control finances for these awards, the GSS Secretary/treasurer will have to do the appropriate account transfers for the GSS portion of the shared financial responsibility.

Carolee, for the Council on Sections, will send out Draft minutes.

Action: Carolee

Slate of GSS officers for 2009

Chair elect: Keven Cecco IRS and Steven Paben BLS

Program chair: Daniel Beckler, USDA and Iris Shimizu, CDC

Council of Sections: Kennon Copeland, NORC and Danna Moore, Utah State

Sonya provided a Publication report. Suggestions for Amstat articles should be sent to Sonya. These articles should enhance GSS recognition and visibility. For the next meeting it is hoped that there will be a list of upcoming articles for the next one year in advance: ½ old or recurring themes and ½ new articles. It was again mentioned that there should be an article in the Amstat news on government section issues.

Action: Sonya

Next meeting to be in early April (now set for April 2)

Action: Robert

The meeting closed with a “Thank you” to outgoing GSS officers.