

Minutes: Government Statistics Section

April 2, 2009

Attended:

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

The meeting opened with a discussion with ASA Executive Director, Ron Wasserstein. A briefing paper for ASA to work with federal agencies to promote work and increase pipeline of new statisticians was attached to the agenda for this meeting.. Ron asked GSS to think about the issues in the paper and ways to collaborate with ASA (in particular, see item 4 in the attachment). Robert asked why ASA should be involved in recruiting for government jobs. From Ron: A role of ASA is to promote statistics as a discipline; the employment problem is also in business and industry, but government pay gap is an additional issue. At the next Joint Statistical Meetings in August Ron plans to meet with industry groups on the issue.

For the government, BLS and other agencies use JSM to recruit, but it was noted that all agencies are now using more contractors to support government work. An underlying issue is getting students to go into statistics - at the high school level there is a need to show how interesting the job can be as a career. At the ASA Chapter level, there was a recent career fair in Chicago that used some multimedia production nuances for federal government recruitment. Another potential recruitment tool is for agency representatives to visit universities – the NCHS university visitation program was mentioned as an example.

The issue of hiring statisticians may be brought up at the Inter-Agency Council on Statistical Programs (ICSP) meeting to be held in two weeks. Other discussion points: possibility of revamping ASA website to make more educational; considerations of whether the current publications are meeting needs of ASA members; further exploration of a “Statistics portal” concept – it was noted that three publishers have been contacted about working with ASA to develop a “Wikipedia” for statistics.

Next steps/process for GSS: Ron noted that he is short on “formality” but he would like to get input from GSS on issues related to the previous discussion. In particular there is a need to consider looking at the image of the statistics profession and how to promote that image, and to consider why statisticians are involved across various disciplines. It was noted that Statistics is a young but expanding discipline, similar to biology, and may be dividing into smaller disciplines. This division may explain, in part, the proliferation of new sections within ASA. Ron asked the GSS to think in general terms and not focus on issues that are specific to a single section. GSS should not consider the new

section/invited sessions issue as there is an ongoing effort to rethink the whole JSM process. .

Ron introduced some guests visiting ASA: Sally Morton, Current President of ASA, Peter (Tony) Lachenbruch, past president and Sastry Pantula next elected president. They were all going to BLS to meet on general issues related to ASA and the agency.

After Ron and the guests left, the formal part of the GSS meeting opened with the welcome and review of today's agenda. Minutes from GSS December meeting were approved, it was noted that the minutes should explicitly reflect action items and the individual responsible for the action item.

The Treasurer's reported that the Current membership count was 394 for the Joint GSS/SSS section and 485 members for the GSS (only) section. The membership numbers have been fairly stable.

The GSS Account Balance as of 12/31/2008 was \$19,221.07. The current (April, 2009) Balance is \$21,117.23 but there will be additional revenue from dues and additional expenses due to JSM. So far, for 2009 the corporate sponsors (\$300 each) are IRS, NCHS, Census, SSA, USDA/NASS. Past contributors, but not in yet: BLS, NSF. The solicitation of corporate sponsors is typically the responsibility of the past GSS Chair, but right now Stephanie is doing this as Carol could not due to potential conflict of interest concerns.. This year there may be a problem with NSF. ACTION item: send GSS newsletter to Federal statistical agencies in order to solicit sponsorship.

Next: a discussion of annual plan for AMSTAT articles. The spreadsheet with the annual plan for AMSTAT news articles was distributed. This plan is co-ordinated with Social Statistics section. The focus of the discussion was on 2009 "holes" plus 2010 planning. For May, there will be an "in-coming chair" article. An announcement of the JSM invited sessions will be in June issue (need June by May 1st - will follow up with email to confirm). For August, Stephanie will submit an article on the Jeanne Griffith award winner. It was suggested that the August article could include mention of all winners for 1 GSS-sponsored award; but it was decided to keep the award announcements separate to get more coverage. It was noted that GSS contributes funds for Griffith award and that the call for next nominations will go out in December. September is a special issue so there are no options for changing content. In October, it was proposed to have an article on the Pat Doyle award. One possibility for a future article, maybe in November, would be to ask Kathy Wallman, OMB, to write an article on the US statistical system.. Someone (?) should check to see if the Herriott award is covered in the publication plan. Any suggestions for 2010 should be discussed in the next meeting at JSM. Some potential article for 2010: Census 2010 article and how big an adventure, communication planning. Kathy Wallman, and her unique experiences in her job, International work (with Statistics Canada, Census), and the possibility of a series of articles by topic area.

The GSS Newsletter has been very successful in getting out every month. One suggested article: Summarize the Executive committee meeting. It was suggested that the corporate sponsors should be noted in each month issue. For May issues, a write-up on recruitment - ask your neighbor to join, come to business meeting suggestion. For June, election

results for 2009. In July, ASA fellows - just members of the GSS (Need to make sure to get all mentions). A suggestion was made to form a GSS fellow committee, but this seems to duplicate the Washington Statistical Society Committee (Randy is a member). If desired, Randy can write something on the nomination process for a future newsletter.

Additional suggestions for the newsletter included reminders of upcoming meetings, International conferences, and lists of new statistical releases from government statistical agencies. For the latter, there would need to be contact, possibly by Email, with the public information officers in the 14 major statistics agencies in the US. A suggestion was made to start with a few agencies and see how the list may grow. Also, should put the GSS Membership form on newsletter, or link to the form.

On the GSS Webpage – current layout shown in handout. There is a need to update sponsors for 2009. There is a need to update the schedule for nominations, review and award of the Jeanne Griffith. Any other updates should be sent to Bill. Monica noted that ASA is about to change providers, so the group to maintain the website will be changing,

On the GSS Brochure – is it useful? Need for the brochure as a handout at the Section table at JSM. Should not print too many, still produce small number. Wendy Alvey should still continue to produce, but the next batch should produce fewer copies.

On the Bullet brochure proposed by Steve Pierson from last meeting. For the agriculture brochure, Carol turned over to the public relations people but has not checked on status. On Education, Natalia not done, intention to do.

Update on JSM 2009. There will be 3 invited session sponsored by the GSS in the 2009 program - one is the “agony and ecstasy of innovation” a second on the use of paradata, and a third on the future of RDD surveys. There will be topic contributed session on the American Community survey and on confidentiality. In addition GSS will sponsor 3 regular contributed paper sessions, 15 posters of which 8 will be placed as a topic contributed poster session. The total of GSS sponsored session is greater than last year. Time slots are not yet finalized.

More on the Poster Sessions. Sungee Lee noted that a lot of abstracts have been transferred to posters and that authors do not yet know this. Note that all of these posters will be judged by GSS. The JSM 2009 Program will be finalized soon. Once finalized, organizers will contact presenters and tell people that they will be part of the Poster competition. Award winners should be publicize in the GSS newsletter and possibly in Amstat news. Sungee Lee will write up something. As for the logistics of the competition: There will be an Executive meeting of the GSS on Monday morning, after the executive meeting, all judges (Lee, Lisa, Mike) will go and judge the Monday posters. At that time, the judges must have the ribbons to give out for the winner and up to two honorable mentions. There will be One blue and two red ribbons available. Monica will provide the ribbons and Lisa will pick them up. The actual award checks will be available later with \$500 for the winner and \$250 for Honorable mention. The intent is to have the winning posters displayed at the GSS business meeting. The JSM request form

should be updated to get the easels for the business meeting and the poster authors should be asked to attend the business meeting. The original concept of having a plaque to present to the agency has been modified and now a letter, on ASA stationary, will be sent to the agency head noting that a staff member has won the Poster award.

General discussion on Food services for JSM 2009. General planning for food for business meeting involves determining the approximate number of attendees, having a fixed charge per person that pays for everything, except the cash bar, but includes the set-up fees. Both the business meeting and the executive meeting will have coffee as part of the setup. The discussion moved from food issues to a more general discussion of the need to have a longer Executive meeting, perhaps 3 hours, at the August meeting. A problem would be the potential conflict with any GSS sponsored 8:30 session. The longer executive meeting would be needed to discuss the specific issue of having a special topic as part of the 2010 JSM.

Planning for JSM 2010. Discussion ensued on Robert's concept of a "Meeting within a meeting." The discussion started with the premise that the JSM was much too large, too diverse, and organizationally too scattered. While JSM has an overall theme, there seems to be no real linkage, even in terms of the Invited sessions. GSS could establish it's own theme with some sessions organized around that theme. Specifically, the planning for JSM could involve setting aside a number of sessions, organize the timing of the sessions to avoid overlap and publish this group of sessions as a distinct subset of the overall meeting. This could create a greater level of effort for the GSS program chair. One potential theme is to highlight the advantages and innovations that come from work in the government sector – this could also be used as a marketing and recruiting tool. This concept of a GSS theme, or an in-depth exploration of a specific issue, was deemed to be worth further consideration. It may be too late for the 2010 meetings as an additional planning structure, with the possibility of a small committee, might be required. The potential of a Meeting within a meeting could be raised at the August business meeting to get feedback from the GSS membership. Note this also ties into Ron Wasserman's request to explore ways of promoting the role of government statistics and how government statistics make a difference. A few key points raised in the discussion. There was a desire to have high profile people involved in a panel or in the presentations associated with a GSS theme, there could be a call for suggested themes from the GSS membership, if an entire group of sessions could not be done then GSS could still leave one invited session open or add an extra topic contributed session for a GSS theme, if too late for 2010 planning maybe a Hot topic session could still be added.

There were a large number of suggestions for possible themes/sessions. Some potential sessions: Statistics as a key to innovation in a data centric world, how government statistics can be improved, a panel on science advisory boards and their impact on statistics, how to get content into government surveys, a panel with agency heads discussing how their agencies make a difference, example of policy impacts of government statistics, use and issues in the American Community Survey, use of government statistics in allocating education dollars, use of government statistics in science and engineering data, general or specific methodology sessions highlighting

government innovations, targeted session for State and local government data, State or community data with federal technology transfer, organization and uses of State center data networks. To further open the door to other suggestions, Lisa could write an article for the January newsletter. Action item: Lisa summarize and send out,. Again, this general topic can be discuss at business meeting in terms of JSM 2011 possibilities

Jeanne E Griffith award (mentoring) deadline tomorrow. Primary sponsor used to be COPAS, now it will be GSS. Committee will meet April 21st sands there will be a June 17th award ceremony On list of committee members, Emerson listed twice, and list should be revise to indicate the year they rotate off the committee. Stephanie chair now, and Carol, as past president of GSS, will take over as chair. The Committee will organize the award ceremony. If possible, have the Award winner come to business meeting at JSM.

2009 student paper competition: GSS supports with SS (Social Statistics) and SRMS (Survey research methods). Five award winners from a total of 12 submitted – Sunge Lee has list of names. All papers presented in one session at JSM – there should be an article in the GSS newsletter. Student winners invited to the GSS business meeting. Note the need to invite ahead of time as students usually don't go to business meetings. Action item: Sungee to invite. Old Issue: the need to finally resolve the Student award funds problem. In recent past, GSS paid the whole bill and other sections were supposed to reimburse. ACTION: Randy should send Carol an email to summarize the past problem and indicating the need for reimbursement from the other two sections. Carol will then follow-up with the sections

Roger Herriott ward is usually presented during a session at JSM. GSS Contribute money, food payment, but the thought was that the award committee would organize the presentation. Robert will follow up, possibly with Frank Potter, Dwight Brock, and/or Brian at OMB (the chair of the award committee). Also, Last year, Social Statistics section covered more than GSS. ACTION Carol and or Robert will follow-up and make a proposal at the August meeting to either reimburse SSS or just have SSS not pay for next year.

For future reference, all of the awards with GSS responsibilities – The award procedures, funding, and presentation requirements need to be very clearly documented.

Council of sections report - there is a handout on the format for reporting section activities - this will be forwarded electronically. The draft August minutes will also be sent forward.

The deadline is June 12th for invited sessions at the May 2010 ENAR in New Orleans.

ICES-IV long term –planning. Carol noted that the three committees to organize the program meet by teleconference The purpose of the main planning committees is to ensure seamless transition to the next cycle, to link to the community of establishments surveys and stat methods, and to carry out general planning, deciding who shall host and

organizing the meeting. The committee also maintain a template for timeline of activities, repository of documents used in planning, maintain a repository of scientific contributions, facilitates exchange of idea, keep a list of plausible stakeholders, to initiates the other two planning committee and to routinely seek confirmation of mandate to continue. The plan for ICES-IV is that the meeting will be held in Montreal, starting June 7, 2012. The organizing group also looked at Boson Pittsburgh and Toronto. There is a concern with lack of formal structure for ASA to sign contracts. It is getting late, it takes about a year, and ASA cant do until all organizations agree to their specific commitment relative to profit and loss. The GSS pledge is to 15 percent. Last time, 5 organizations signed (actually signed sequentially which delayed the process some). It was noted that ISI might "own" the committee and for ICES-IV there could l be issues of attendance due to budgets and travel restrictions.

COPAS report. Steve noted that COPAS has or is reviewing the budgets of statistical agencies. There will be an article in Amstat news next June 5th - there is a need to add the article to planning schedule and to submit through Sonya. The quarterly meetings of COPAS are reported in Amstat news