

GSS/SSS JANUARY 2006 NEWSLETTER
Government Statistics and Social Statistics Sections
American Statistical Association

GSS web site: <http://www.amstat.org/sections/sgovt/>

SSS web site: <http://www.amstat.org/sections/ssoc/>

Editor: Pat Melvin
(patricia.l.melvin@census.gov)

GSS Publications Officer: Robert Lussier
(robert.lussier@statcan.ca)

SSS Publications Officer: Beth Kilss
(beth.a.kilss@irs.gov)

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**Government Statistics Section**

**THE AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS OBSERVES A CENTENARY OF ACHIEVEMENT**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics will celebrate its centenary this year with the release of the ABS history book, *Informing a Nation*; the Centenary Ball; and the annual Ken Foreman lecture. Like all big anniversaries, it is a time for the ABS to reflect on the past and to look forward.



*The Mission of the Australian Bureau of Statistics*

Since colonial times, Australia's official statistics have been regarded as first-class. To a large extent, this is because sound and contemporary statistical methods were embraced in the compilation of official statistics. Throughout the past 50 years, the statistical methods used by the ABS have been heavily influenced by developments in mathematical statistics.

In delivering the Ken Foreman lecture, Australian statistician Dennis Trewin reviewed the development of statistical methods in official statistics throughout the past 100 years. He also speculated on how mathematical statistical techniques might impact the future work of the ABS.

Trewin began by looking at the legendary figure for who the lecture is named. The bureau's long history of commitment to research and methodology is in no small part attributable to the efforts of many statistical officers in pursuit of excellence, but none more so than Foreman. Foreman led the widespread introduction of mathematical statistical methods, especially sample surveys, to the work of the bureau. As former Australian statistician Bill McLennan described him, "Foreman was undoubtedly the father of statistical methods at the ABS. He was the leader of the first methodology unit and continued to foster, expand, and lead it until his retirement from the ABS in 1984."

Foreman introduced the bureau to formal sampling methodology. This included formalizing the techniques used for current samples and standardizing those to be employed for future sampling work. He also developed comprehensive training for the benefit of those working in the area, as the level of knowledge and practical ability required for this type of work was not yet obtainable from universities in Australia. In *Informing a Nation*, a young Foreman is pictured during fieldwork in Papua New Guinea. Wearing a well-worn khaki shirt and broad-rimmed hat, he resembles the Indiana Jones character. Indeed, he saw some real-life adventure. Foreman joined the Royal Australian Air Force in 1943, becoming a bomber navigator, but was badly injured and endured a long convalescence when he was shot down in a Lancaster later that year.



*A young Ken Foreman, first head of the ABS's Methodology area, undertaking fieldwork for the Papua New Guinea Census in the 1960's.*

Eventually, Foreman returned to Australia to study and graduated with a bachelor's in economics with honors from the University of Sydney. By mid-1952, he had gone overseas to study at the U.S. Census Bureau under Morris Hansen and Bill Hurwitz, two of the most famous names in sampling at the time. He also had the opportunity to meet W. Edwards Deming, who provided the inspiration for his work on quality control. Foreman traveled overseas several times to study the latest developments in sampling in the United States. In this way, the bureau's sampling ability remained abreast of developments in theory and technique. As Foreman said in 1977, "The application of mathematical statistical techniques to an increasing range of the bureau's operations has resulted in many notable innovations which, in total, have significantly altered the bureau's capabilities and economics."

Today, Foreman is remembered with respect, awe, gratitude, and fondness. He raised the level of methodological competence in the bureau and was a key player in the following four important developments:

- implementation of significant sampling techniques
- design and implementation of the household survey system
- pioneering work in development and application of seasonal adjustment
- the introduction of data management.

He also was a significant, caring, and generous mentor for several generations of young statistical officers in the bureau. "He was a legend; he had some god-like qualities," said Trewin. One noteworthy development during the Foreman era occurred in 1977, when the post-enumeration survey was used to adjust for the census undercount. Trewin pointed out that Australia had pioneered this exercise. "The [United States] still has not got around to adjusting their census undercount," he said. "I think we were the first country to do it way back in 1977...we just thought it was common sense. There has been no criticism of it since then. But it does mean that the way population statistics are used in Australia is much better than in many other countries. Subsequently, countries such as Canada have copied what we've done."

Of course, Foreman was not the first, nor the only, figure driving ABS's renowned mathematical statistical methods. One of the earliest examples of the bureau's contribution to international statistical methods was *The Mathematical Theory of*



*Population*. It was released in 1917 as an appendix to the *Statistician's Report for the 1911 Census* under the authorship of the then Commonwealth statistician George Handley Knibbs. "It comprised 450 pages, so it was some appendix," said Trewin. This publication had a two-fold purpose of attempting to establish suitable methods for analyzing census and demographic data and actually using those techniques to analyze the 1911 census results. Trewin said elements of this work still are used in demographic work in Australia and elsewhere. "This really is a book that has aged very well. It has stood the test of time," he said.



ABS staff members observe the formal launch of the ABS history book, *Informing a Nation*, from the sky bridges in the atrium of ABS House in Canberra, Australia.

"Even from those early days, the ABS was interested in methodology...even though we were a small, young country, our statistical services were regarded as world-class," Trewin said. In fact, the ABS first gained world recognition when

Roland Wilson, then second in charge at the bureau, developed his balance of payments statistics. Based on his PhD work, it was released as a chapter in the 1933 *Year Book*.

The key development in the early 1980s was the introduction of synchronized sampling (a variant of Brewer's collocated sampling, which used a permanent random number method) to business surveys. Trewin said one reason the ABS had been successful with its methodological developments was that there had been a strong alignment between the ABS's statistical and methodological areas. "Ken Foreman was very keen that methodological people interact with the other business areas so that they could be seen and heard; and that they weren't working in a vacuum—they could actually understand the context of the work they had been doing," he said. "The other sense of alignment is that the other business areas...had a working knowledge of methodology...so they could have meaningful communications with the methodologists. In some statistical offices, that does not happen. The methodologists are poked away in the corner to do their own thing and have a much smaller influence on the work of the office than what our methodologists have."

Importantly, support for methodology by senior ABS managers has been strong. "The past two Australian statisticians had a methodological background, so [support] was probably more straightforward then, but it actually happened right back from Keith Archer's days in the 1950s and 1960s," Trewin said. "There was from the senior ABS management support for methodology development. They [methodologists] weren't regarded with suspicion by senior managers; they were regarded as important."

Turning to the future, Trewin said that as a statistical producer, the bureau's methodological challenges include the following:

- Emerging statistical outputs (e.g., environmental statistics, longitudinal analysis) requiring the application of novel sampling methods
- Combining survey and administrative data
- Extracting information from large databases (e.g., EFTPOS, scanner databases, tax databases)
- Use of analytical- or model-based methods to produce official statistics
- Data linking increasingly used to provide official statistics
- Confidentiality and microdata access introducing new confidentiality challenges
- Internet and web-based surveys—a number of new challenges in both survey and form design
- Small-area statistics—satisfying the increased demand for data
- International surveys—ensuring the data really are comparable.

He said the other half of the ABS charter is as a statistical leader. This role includes producing manuals of good practice, training in statistical methods, and providing advisory services. Despite such a proud history of achievements over a century, the ABS will not rest on reputation. And that includes ensuring the caliber of its staff remains world-class. Trewin said he was concerned about the future supply of mathematical statistics graduates in Australia. "We feel the supply is dwindling at the same time as the demand is increasing," he said. "The ABS has taken a strong interest in seeing what can be done. We want to try and get a more uniform approach to [the] teaching of statistics at schools, so you have a framework for developing resource materials and a framework for the training of teachers of statistics."

With such an enviable and sustained record of quality and a focus on the future, another generation should celebrate the ABS's second century with pride.

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REMINDER ABOUT ABSTRACT DEADLINE:

Topic Contributed Session abstracts and regular contributed abstracts for the Joint Statistical Meetings (JSM), August 6-10 in Seattle, Washington, can be submitted until **February 1, 2006**.

For specific information, please go to www.amstat.org ; Meetings; JSM2006; Program: Abstract Submission. Abstracts may be submitted online until the deadline. The 2006 JSM theme is "Statistics for an Uncertain World: Meeting Global Challenges."

It is generally agreed that Topic Contributed Sessions are preferable to Regular Contributed Sessions in that the sessions are usually more cohesive and the speakers have more time. If you are organizing a Government statistics-related session or even just thinking about it, please keep Michael Cohen, 2006 Program Chair for the Government Statistics Section, in the loop (michael.cohen@dot.gov).

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## Social Statistics Section

### SOCIAL STATISTICS SECTION—2005—A LOOK BACK

*By Gerald Gates, 2005 Chair*

As we look forward to the promises of a new year, we also look back at the many opportunities given us, the accomplishments we made, and friendships we built during 2005. Our section has a long and storied history and, based on the energy I have experienced over the past year by the members of your Executive Committee, it has a great future ahead. Our year began with a commitment to reaffirm our identity and determine what sets us apart from other sections. We also began work on a strategic plan focused on providing the services our members want and looked for new opportunities for partnering with related sections of ASA as well as other associations supporting social statisticians. Below are highlights of our activities and accomplishments this year.

- **Meetings:** The Executive Committee met formally on four occasions during the year, including our annual meeting in Minneapolis at the Joint Statistical Meetings.
- **Strategic Planning and Identity:** The Executive Committee undertook an effort to assess its identity by defining what sets it apart from other sections and committees. We determined that the current identity statement, as described in our brochure, best articulates who we are. We also began efforts to more strategically target our resources to meet our members' needs. Two areas we are pursuing are more targeted sessions for demographers at JSM and short courses of interest to social statisticians.
- **Conferences and Education:** Thanks to the efforts of Renee Miller and Juanita Lott, we put on a very successful program at the 2005 Joint Statistical Meetings including five invited and three topic contributed sessions.
- **Communication:**
  - Special recognition is deserved for Beth Kilss for her efforts in revitalizing the section's joint Newsletter and our visibility in *Amstat News*. Together with Government Statistics Section, we produced nine issues of the Newsletter in 2005 and, separately, we published articles in each of the monthly issues of *Amstat News*.
  - The section's presence on the ASA Web site was targeted for improvement. We approved spending a modest amount of funds to be spent in 2006 for improving our page and adding new content.
  - We also recognized a need to establish a listserve for our members. We will be adding this feature as part of a broader ASA listserve effort.
- **Awards and Scholarships:** The section jointly sponsors several awards each year. This year, the awards and winners were:
  - **Roger Herriot Award** was given to Bob Fay of the Census Bureau.
  - **Jeanne E. Griffith Mentoring Award** was given to our own Renee Miller of the Energy Information Administration.
  - **Wray Jackson Smith Scholarship** was given to Layla Parast of The University of Texas at Austin.
  - **Student Paper Competition** winners were Gabriele Durrant, Southampton Statistical Sciences Research Institute; Kelly Dixon, U.S. Census Bureau; Mike Kwanisai, NORC at the University of Chicago; Zingzhao Yu, The Ohio State University; and Marcel de Toledo Vieira, University of Southampton.
- **Fellows:** The Executive Committee approved the establishment of a Social Statistics Section ASA Fellows Nominating Committee. The new committee consists of Colm O'Muircheartaigh, Dan Weinberg, and John Thompson.
- **New Officers:** A strong slate of candidates for officers resulted in the election of Jennifer Madans as 2007 Chair, Allen Schirm as 2007 Program Chair, and Dawn Nelson as 2006-2007 Secretary-Treasurer.

I hope you will agree that the future looks bright for our section. I want to personally offer my thanks for those who have served so ably in getting us where we are today and, in particular, to recognize Colm O'Muircheartaigh, Renee Miller, and Susan Hinkins, whose terms ended in December 2005 this year. Finally, I offer my encouragement and support to our new officers as they continue our efforts to better serve our members.

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ADDENDUM TO THE DECEMBER 2005 NEWSLETTER

A couple of our readers commented on the lead article in last month's issue, "Reading of Interest: Revisions to Two Key Statistical Agency Guidebooks and Freaks in the Ranks?". As a result, Author Shelly Ver Ploeg would like to add the following: "Last month's newsletter contained a brief review of the 2nd edition of *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency*, a publication of the Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT). Alert readers notified me that an updated 3rd edition was issued last spring."

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**THE PASSING OF JOSEPH WAKSBERG**

The entire statistical community mourns the loss of Joe Waksberg, Senior Statistician and Chairman of the Westat Board of Directors, who passed away suddenly on January 10, at Suburban Hospital in Bethesda, MD. In addition to his enormous contribution to Westat for the past 30 years, Joe was loved by all who had the good fortune to know him and to work with him.

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SOC FELLOWS COMMITTEE REQUEST

Dear Social Statistics Section member:

The Social Statistics Section (SOC) is seeking your collaboration in improving the selection of ASA Fellows. The section has set up the SOC Fellows Committee to facilitate the nomination of SOC members as Fellows of ASA. As you know, the actual selection of Fellows is carried out by a central ASA Fellows Committee. Thus, the purpose of our section's committee is to identify worthy candidates and provide help in putting together the nomination package for the candidates. In a few cases, a SOC Committee member will prepare the nomination package; in most cases, the SOC Committee will attempt to identify a lead nominator and, then, advise and/or provide editorial assistance.

The three members of the 2006 SOC Fellows Committee are Colm O'Muircheartaigh (chair), colm@uchicago.edu; Dan Weinberg, daniel.h.weinberg@census.gov; and John Thompson, thompson-john@norc.org.

Please get in touch with any or all of them with your suggestions. All the committee's activities will be kept confidential. If you make a nomination, a brief (or lengthy) indication of the basis for the nomination would be appreciated.

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**HERRIOT AWARD NOMINATIONS SOUGHT**

Nominations are being sought for the **2006 Roger Herriot Award for Innovation in Federal Statistics**. The award is intended to reflect the special characteristics that marked Roger Herriot's career:

- Dedication to the issues of measurement;
- Improvements in the efficiency of data collection programs; and
- Improvements and use of statistical data for policy analysis.

The award is not limited to senior members of an organization, nor is it to be considered as a culmination of a long period of service. Individuals at all levels within Federal agencies, other government organizations, nonprofits, the private sector, and the academic community may be nominated on the basis of their contributions.

The recipient of the 2006 Roger Herriot Award will be chosen by a committee comprising representatives of the Social Statistics and Government Statistics Sections of the American Statistical Association and of the Washington Statistical Society. Roger Herriot was associated with and strongly supportive of these organizations during his career. The award consists of an honorarium and a framed citation.

Joseph Waksberg (Westat), Monroe Sirken (National Center for Health Statistics), Constance Citro (National Academy of Sciences), Roderick Harrison (U.S. Census Bureau), Clyde Tucker (Bureau of Labor Statistics), Thomas Jabine (SSA, EIA, CNSTAT), Donald Dillman (Washington State University), Jeanne Griffith (OMB, NCES, NSF), Daniel Weinberg (U.S. Census Bureau), David Banks (FDA, BTS, NIST), Paula Schneider (U.S. Census Bureau), and Robert E. Fay III (U.S. Census Bureau) are previous recipients of the Roger Herriot Award.

**For more information, contact:** Lawrence Cox, Chair, Roger Herriot Award Committee, (301) 458-4631 or [LCox@CDC.Gov](mailto:LCox@CDC.Gov). There are no fixed requirements for the contents or format of nomination packages, but completed packages must be received by **May 1, 2006**. Electronic submissions to Dr. Cox in MS-Word or PDF format are encouraged.

**Alternately, nominations may be mailed to:** Lawrence H. Cox, National Center for Health Statistics, 3311 Toledo Road, Room 3211, Hyattsville, MD 20782

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NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR 2006 JULIUS SHISKIN AWARD

Nominations are invited for the annual **Julius Shiskin Memorial Award for Economic Statistics**. The Award is given in recognition of unusually original and important contributions in the development of economic statistics or in the use of statistics in interpreting the economy. Contributions are recognized for statistical research, development of statistical tools, application of information technology techniques, use of economic statistical programs, management of statistical programs, or developing public understanding of measurement issues. The Award was established in 1980 by the Washington Statistical Society (WSS) and is now cosponsored by the WSS, the National Association for Business Economics, and the Business and Economics Statistics Section of the American Statistical Association. The 2005 award recipient was Erwin Diewert, University of British Columbia, in recognition of his path-breaking economic theoretical innovations, notably in index number theory, which have been adapted to improve national economic statistics around the world.

Nominations for the 2006 award are now being accepted. Individuals or groups in the public or private sector from any country can be nominated. The award will be presented with an honorarium of \$750 plus additional recognition from the sponsors. A nomination form and a list of all previous recipients are available on the ASA Website at : < www.amstat.org/sections/bus_econ/shiskin.html > or by writing to the Julius Shiskin Award Committee, Attn: Monica Clark, American Statistical Association, 1429 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3402.

Completed nominations must be **received by April 1, 2006**. For further information contact Rich Allen, Julius Shiskin Award Committee Secretary, at < reisepaar2@earthlink.net >.

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#### **THE JEANNE E. GRIFFITH MENTORING AWARD**

The Jeanne E. Griffith Mentoring Award has been established to encourage mentoring of younger staff in the Federal statistical system. It is presented annually, beginning in 2003, to a supervisor who is nominated by co-workers and supervisors, and chosen by the Award Selection Committee.



The award is co-sponsored by the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy, the Council for Excellence in Government, the Washington Statistical Society, the Social Statistics and Government Statistics Sections of the American Statistical Association, and the Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics.

Nominations for 2006 will be accepted beginning in **February 2006**. The last date for submission of nominations is **March 31, 2006**, and the Award Committee will make its determination of the award winner by May 1, 2006. The award will consist of a \$1,000 honorarium and a citation, which will be presented at a ceremony arranged by the co-sponsors in June 2006.

The winning mentor will be selected for his or her efforts in supporting the work and developing the careers of younger staff. Examples of typical mentoring activities include:

- Advising junior staff to help them create career opportunities, networking skills, and contacts for growth and development;
- Counseling junior staff and providing resources to help develop their technical writing, analysis, presentation and organizational skills and knowledge;
- Encouraging junior staff growth and career development through attendance and oral presentations at meetings with higher level officials, staffs of other agencies, professional associations, training courses, and conferences;
- Motivating junior staff and building self confidence through feedback on their efforts, being a listener when that is needed, and creating a caring and supportive environment; -
- Serving as a role model for junior staff through professional expertise, information and insights, balancing collegial and personal roles, and including everyone across rank, race, ethnicity, and seniority.

For further information on the award, contact:

**Ed Spar, Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics (COPAFS) by phone: 703-836-0404; fax: 703-684-3410; or by e-mail at [copafs@aol.com](mailto:copafs@aol.com).**

The nomination cover sheet and guidelines form--or a photocopy of it--should be attached to a nomination memorandum or letter. Forms can be obtained by contacting Ed Spar, or by downloading from the COPAFS website at <http://www.copafs.org>. All nominations should be returned to the Jeanne E. Griffith Mentoring Award Committee, c/o COPAFS, 1429 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314 **no later than March 31, 2006**.

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THE GERTRUDE COX SCHOLARSHIP FOR WOMEN IN GRADUATE STATISTICS PROGRAMS

Sponsored by: The ASA Committee on Women in Statistics and the Caucus for Women in Statistics

Purpose: To encourage more women to enter statistically oriented professions

How much: \$1,000

When: Application deadline is **April 1, 2006**
Award announced in August 2006 at the Joint Statistical Meeting

Who: Women who are citizens or permanent residents of the United States or Canada and who are admitted to full-time study in a graduate statistics program by July 1, 2006. Women in or entering the early stages of graduate training (M.S. or Ph.D.) are especially encouraged to apply.

Application: To get your Gertrude Cox Scholarship application form: Download form from - <http://www.amstat.org/awards/index.cfm?fuseaction=cox-scholarship>, or receive the form by mail or email – send your request to Chair, Gertrude Cox Scholarship Committee.

For more information: Contact Holly B. Shulman, M.S., Chair Gertrude Cox Scholarship Committee, 205 College Avenue, Swarthmore, PA 19081. Phone: (610) 690-0861; email: hbsl@cdc.gov.

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## **ANNOUNCING THE 2004 SSA BENEFITS AND EARNINGS PUBLIC-USE FILE**

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has released the 2004 Benefits and Earnings Public-Use File. This microdata file consists of two separate but linkable subfiles—one with benefit information and the other with longitudinal earnings information. Sample beneficiary records drawn from the Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) program can be linked to their corresponding earnings histories.

These microdata—approximately 470,000 records—are highly valuable since this is the first public release of longitudinal earnings records drawn as a representative sample of the beneficiary population. Because of the importance of earnings histories for calculating benefits, this file is expected to have broad appeal to outside researchers studying Social Security-related issues. All identifiers have been removed to protect individual privacy.

The benefit subfile contains data on demographic characteristics, entitlement, type of benefit, and benefit amounts, and the earnings subfile contains data on number of credits and earnings. These microdata and their supporting documentation are available at <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/policy/docs/microdata/>.

The release of this public-use file represents continued efforts by the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics to make Social Security administrative data available for research purposes. Comments concerning these files can be sent to [mbr.microdata@ssa.gov](mailto:mbr.microdata@ssa.gov).

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ANNOUNCING THE 23RD INTERNATIONAL METHODOLOGY SYMPOSIUM

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN MEASURING POPULATION HEALTH

Who: Organized by Statistics Canada

When: November 1 - 3, 2006

Where: Chateau Cartier, Gatineau, Quebec

The Symposium will bring together statistical methodologists and analysts addressing a variety of methodological topics related to producing reliable information on population health, such as: design issues in cross-sectional and longitudinal health surveys, combining data from different sources, use of administrative health data, use of physical measurements, new collection methods in health surveys, development and testing of questionnaires and other instruments, non-sampling errors, assurance of data quality, confidentiality and disclosure control for health-related data, estimation and variance estimation, health information at the small-area level, imputation and editing of health data, health status indices and measures and methods for international comparisons of them, health-related quality of life assessments, mapping health data and use of geographical information systems, and other methods for analysis of health data.

For the Symposium, we plan two one-day workshops and about forty invited and contributed presentations. Proceedings from the conference will be published.

The Symposium will be beneficial for survey methodologists, statisticians with interest in survey methodology, and the practicing health analysts and researchers engaged in population health analysis.

Note that the beginning of November is usually dry, sunny and mild in Ottawa.

For more information, send e-mail inquiries to symposium2006@statcan.ca, or contact Milorad Kovacevic by phone at 613-951-9891 or by e-mail at Milorad.Kovacevic@statcan.ca.

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## Government Statistics Section

### Mission Statement

*The mission of the Government Statistics Section (GSS) is to promote the use of sound statistical theory and methods in the production of data at all levels of government – be it Federal, State, local, or international; assist in the broad dissemination of those data; and encourage good statistical practice by all users. Areas of interest for the Section include all that involve the production, dissemination, and application of governmental statistics, including concern with statistical policy issues, quality and usefulness of governmental data products, special problems of State and local data, comparability of data among different countries, and the role of professional statisticians in the public sector.*

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Social Statistics Section

Mission Statement

The Social Statistics Section seeks to advance research in social statistics, both in areas which involve the use of methods of statistical inquiry, and in those which involve the use of statistical data and the development of statistical measurement. This section will also plan for active participation in the affairs of the American Statistical Association by those interested in these matters and for representation of activities in this major field in the program of the ASA.

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## GOVERNMENT STATISTICS SECTION OFFICERS AND CONTACTS

### Stephanie Shipp

Chair, 2006

[stephanie.shipp@nist.gov](mailto:stephanie.shipp@nist.gov)

### Chet Bowie

Chair, 2005

[chet\\_bowie@marketstrategies.com](mailto:chet_bowie@marketstrategies.com)

### Stephen Cohen

Chair, 2007

[cohen.steve@bls.gov](mailto:cohen.steve@bls.gov)

### Michael P. Cohen

Program Chair, 2006

[michael.cohen@bts.gov](mailto:michael.cohen@bts.gov)

### Roberta L. Sangster

Program Chair, 2007

[sangster\\_r@bls.gov](mailto:sangster_r@bls.gov)

### John W. Hall

Secretary/Treasurer, 2005-06

[jhall@mathematica-mpr.com](mailto:jhall@mathematica-mpr.com)

### Daniel Kasprzyk

Council of Sections Rep, 2004-06

[dkasprzyk@mathematica-mpr.com](mailto:dkasprzyk@mathematica-mpr.com)

### Robert Lussier

Publications Officer, 2005-06

[robert.lussier@statcan.ca](mailto:robert.lussier@statcan.ca)

### Wendy Alvey

COPAFS Rep, 2005-06

[wendy.l.alvey@census.gov](mailto:wendy.l.alvey@census.gov)

### Pat Melvin

Newsletter Editor

[patricia.l.melvin@census.gov](mailto:patricia.l.melvin@census.gov)

### Bill Wong

Assistant Editor, *Amstat* Online

[william.wong@irs.gov](mailto:william.wong@irs.gov)

### Tai Phan

GSSLIST Coordinator

[tai.phan@ed.gov](mailto:tai.phan@ed.gov)

### Monica Clark

ASA Ex Officio

[monica@amstat.org](mailto:monica@amstat.org)

## SOCIAL STATISTICS SECTION OFFICERS AND CONTACTS

**Susan Schechter**

Chair, 2006

[susan\\_schechter@omb.eop.gov](mailto:susan_schechter@omb.eop.gov)

**Jerry Gates**

Chair, 2005

[gerald.w.gates@census.gov](mailto:gerald.w.gates@census.gov)

**Jennifer H. Madans**

Chair 2007

[jennifer.h.madans@nchs.gov](mailto:jennifer.h.madans@nchs.gov)

**Juanita Tamayo Lott**

Program Chair, 2006

[juanita.t.lott@census.gov](mailto:juanita.t.lott@census.gov)

**Allen L. Schirm**

Program Chair 2007

[aschirm@mathematica-mpr.com](mailto:aschirm@mathematica-mpr.com)

**Dawn VonThurn Nelson**

Secretary/Treasurer 2006

[dawn.v.nelson@census.gov](mailto:dawn.v.nelson@census.gov)

**Trivellore Raghunathan**

Council of Sections Rep, 2004-06

[teraghu@umich.edu](mailto:teraghu@umich.edu)

**Beth Kilss**

Publications Officer, 2005-06

[beth.a.kilss@irs.gov](mailto:beth.a.kilss@irs.gov)

**David Nichols**

Assistant Editor, *Amstat* Online

[dnichols@spss.com](mailto:dnichols@spss.com)

**Monica Clark**

ASA Ex Officio

[monica@amstat.org](mailto:monica@amstat.org)