

GSS/SSS MARCH 2012 NEWSLETTER
Government Statistics and Social Statistics Sections
American Statistical Association

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

GSS Publications Officer: Sonya L. Vartivarian
(VartivarianS@gao.gov)

SSS Publications Officer: Joanna M. Turner
(turn0053@umn.edu)

Newsletter Editor: Natalya Verbitsky-Savitz
(NVsavitz@Mathematica-MPR.com)

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UPCOMING DEADLINES AND EVENTS:

April

- 1 Application deadline for Wray Jackson Smith Scholarship
- 2 Nominations are due for Jeanne E. Griffith Mentoring Award
- 25 Half-day training: Transitioning to the New American FactFinder

May

- 1 JSM 2012 Registration and Housing Open

COUNCIL OF PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS ON FEDERAL STATISTICS: DECEMBER 2011 MEETING

Submitted by Robert Lussier, COPAFS representative, Government Statistics Section

Note: The Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics (COPAFS) acts as the advocate for the development and dissemination of high-quality federal statistics. Member organizations include professional associations, businesses, research institutes, and others interested in Federal statistics. Through COPAFS, members have an opportunity to review and have an impact on issues including timeliness, quality, confidentiality, and the relevance of data. COPAFS holds quarterly meetings, the last one occurred on December 2, 2011. Detailed minutes, together with copies of the overheads used by the presenters can be found on COPAFS website www.copafs.org.

COPAFS chair, Felice Levine, announced that Ed Spar will be stepping down as COPAFS executive director at the end of 2012. Anybody interested in the executive director position should contact the Board.

All current eligible Board members agreed to serve for the coming year, namely:

- Chair—Felice Levine;
- Vice Chair—Maurine Haver;
- Secretary—Ken Hodges;
- Treasurer—Seth Grimes;
- Past Chair—Judie Mopsik and
- Members at large—Ralph Rector; Linda Jacobsen; Bob Parker; and Chet Bowie.

A motion to approve the 2012 Board was made and seconded, and the 2012 Board was approved.

As part of his Executive Director's Report, Ed Spar talked about the budget situation. Most agencies are anticipating lower budgets than in the previous year. Especially hard-hit agencies include the Census Bureau, Bureau of Economic Analysis, and Bureau of Justice Statistics.

A Review of Plans for the National Center for Education Statistics

Marilyn Seastrom, National Center for Education Statistics, described her organization as collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating statistics on the condition and progress of education at the preschool, elementary, secondary, postsecondary, and adult levels in the USA and other nations.

The NCES budget has been just under \$240 million in recent years. The NCES major divisions are devoted to assessment; early childhood international and crosscutting studies; elementary/secondary and libraries studies; and postsecondary studies.

Ms. Seastrom presented information on NCES' programs and surveys. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is an on-going nationwide assessment of what American students know and can do in various subject areas. Year 2011 had notable projects including a 2009 science report card, 2009 high school transcript study, and 2010 report cards on civics, history, geography, reading and mathematics. A State Mapping Report is using NAEP as a yardstick to compare proficiency standards across states. The report finds wide variation among state proficiency standards.

Other programs include a GeoMapping application that currently reports data at the school district level, but is being enhanced to produce boundaries for specific public schools; the Schools and Staffing Survey; the College Affordability and Transparency Center (providing information on tuition and net prices at postsecondary institutions); a Baccalaureate and Beyond study; a Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies; and the National Household Education Surveys (NHES). Ms. Seastrom described improvements being applied to the various surveys.

An Overview of American Demographic History.

Census Bureau retiree, Campbell Gibson, described the website (www.demographicchartbook.com) that he and some colleagues are putting together. The website is devoted to the demographic history of the USA as shown by data from the census. The census is a great source of historical data and trends—many going back to the first census in

1790. Mr. Gibson acknowledged “Historical Statistics of the United States: Millennial Edition” as the source of many of their data points.

Mr. Gibson proceeded with a series of charts illustrating interesting historical facts and patterns. He concluded by suggesting that census data can make valuable contributions to the teaching of American history, and expressed hope that the website might encourage greater use of census data in the history classroom.

Rural Statistical Areas: A Rural-Centric Approach to Defining Geographic Areas

Michael Ratcliffe, US Census Bureau, described the Rural Statistical Area (RSA)--a concept proposed in response (1) to dissatisfaction with the way urban and metropolitan definitions treat rural and non-metropolitan areas as residuals and (2) to frustration with the limited geographic detail for which 1-year American Community Survey (ACS) data are reported. For example, a state could have rural area with a population of 400,000, but no way to subdivide this rural area into smaller areas meeting the 65,000 population threshold for the reporting of 1-year ACS data.

The RSA concept was developed as part of a three-year joint research project between the Census Bureau and the State Data Centers (SDCs). The goal was to use rural counties (and potentially county subdivisions, and/or census tracts) as building blocks to create rural or predominantly rural sub-state areas of 65,000 or more people to enhance the analysis of 1-year ACS data. “Urban” would be the residual in this scheme.

The RSA delineation process started with the classification of counties based on the US Department of Agriculture’s Urban Influence (UI) codes, which distinguish non-metro counties according to factors such as adjacency to metro areas and presence of an urban core. Counties with populations of 65,000 or more were designated as “standalone” RSAs and are, in effect, the residual urban areas. The next step was to aggregate smaller counties in a meaningful way. The approach used established initial groupings based on the UI codes and highway networks. Non-standalone counties were combined until the population threshold of 65,000 was reached. The initial groupings were later modified in an interactive process with the SDCs.

Looking to “next steps,” Mr. Ratcliffe explained that the SDC Steering Committee has asked the Census Bureau to adopt RSAs as a standard tabulation geography. The Census Bureau is agreeable, but wants to review the concept further, and issue a Federal Register notice seeking comments.

Research on Measuring Same-sex Couples

Nancy Bates, US Census Bureau, presented on Measurement Error in Relationship and Marital Status Questions. The Bureau faces challenges as societal and legal definitions of marriage have changed, and new terms--such as same-sex husbands/wives, domestic partnerships, and civil unions--have become widespread. Complicating matters are state to state variations in the recognition of same-sex marriage, and the lack of any federal level recognition.

An Interagency Workgroup on Measuring Relationships in Federal Household Surveys has conducted focus groups, and found that respondents have interpreted questions in a manner consistent with legal status. However, the groups identified the need for response options reflecting new legal unions. New versions of the Relationship and Marital Status questions were developed. Cognitive interviews were conducted. The next steps call for further testing of the recommended version of these questions.

Martin O'Connell, US Census Bureau, described data on same-sex couple households. The totals fluctuate, with 2000 census reporting about 250,000 same-sex married couples, ACS estimating just under 400,000 through 2007, then dropping to under 150,000 due to forms and processing changes. The 2010 census count jumped back up to 350,000—a total known to be unrealistically high. A revised version of the 2010 census count brings the number back down to about 130,000.

One might expect that the excess of same-sex married couples would trace to same-sex couples reporting as married when that status is not legally recognized. However, the Census Bureau noticed that the excess in the original 2010 number was most pronounced in areas with high levels of non-response follow up (NRFU). The NRFU form that was used had a presentation of the male/female response option that was prone to misreporting. In other words, accidental errors in the reporting of sex seem to have created much of the excess same-sex couples. The NRFU form was also used in the 2000 census. This problem also existed with the 2000 census, but it was not recognized.

When the excess of same-sex couples was noticed, the Bureau investigated the impact of sex misreporting by comparing reported sex with the likelihood of the name being of that sex. Almost one third of same-sex couples were found to be probably opposite sex. With these households reclassified, the same-sex totals dropped to levels consistent with recent ACS estimates and are reported in the “preferred” version.

This concluded the December meeting. The next COPAFS meeting will take place **March 16, 2012.**

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**2012 WRAY JACKSON SMITH SCHOLARSHIP    NEW!**

*Submitted by John Czajka, Wray Jackson Smith Scholarship Committee Chair*

The Wray Jackson Smith Scholarship (WJSS) was created to honor the memory of a founding member of the GSS and a long-time contributor to federal statistics. Dr. Smith's federal career spanned four decades and included positions in (1) the Office of Economic Opportunity, where he was responsible for the operational start-up of the Job Corps and evaluation of manpower development programs; (2) the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation in what was then the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, where he oversaw the policy research data center and directed the Income Survey Development Program (the predecessor to the Survey of Income and Program Participation); and (3) the Energy Information Administration, U.S. Department of Energy, where he directed energy modeling and data systems development and provided oversight of the Department's surveys of energy consumption in multiple sectors. After retiring from the federal government in 1983, Dr. Smith continued to play a role in federal statistics from the private sector, first as a visiting senior fellow at Mathematica Policy Research and then at Synectics for Management Decisions, Inc., before founding Harris-Smith Research, an operations research/management science consulting group, with Carl Harris. In 1997 Dr. Smith established the independent, nonprofit Harris-Smith Institutes to provide statistical research and a range of other services to other nonprofit organizations and governmental entities. He served as president of the organization until his death at the age of 75, in May 2000.

The WJSS was established by the GSS in 2001, with several other organizations recognized as Founding Sponsors. These include the Social Statistics Section (SSS) of ASA, which joined the GSS in 2005 as a primary sponsor of the award; the Caucus for Women in Statistics; the Washington Statistical Society; and both Mathematica and Synectics. In addition, upon its disbandment in 2002, The Harris-Smith Institutes donated a substantial sum to the scholarship fund, which achieved a milestone in 2004 by reaching \$25,000, sufficient to establish an endowment through the ASA.

The WJSS is intended to encourage young statisticians to consider a career in government service. The WJSS Award provides funding of \$1,000 to be used in ways that will advance the recipient's exposure to or experience with the application of statistics to problems relevant to any level of government. Past winners have used their awards to attend the Joint Statistical Meetings or other professional conferences; to take short courses or college classes on topics related to data analysis, measurement, or data quality; and to support aspects of their continued public policy research. Funds may be used for travel, board, tuition or registration fees, or for the purchase of books, software, data sets, or other supporting materials for research projects.

The WJSS is targeted at students and others early in their careers who show an interest in government statistics. Applicants must have a Bachelor's degree or equivalent level of education. Membership in the GSS, SSS, or the ASA is not required. Applicants are asked to submit a proposal for the activity to be funded and to complete an application form (found on the GSS website at <http://www.amstat.org/sections/sgovt> and provide two letters of recommendation. Materials should be submitted to:

Wray Jackson Smith Scholarship Committee  
c/o John L. Czajka  
Mathematica Policy Research  
1100 First Street, NE, 12th Floor  
Washington, DC 20002-4221

or electronically to [jczajka@mathematica-mpr.com](mailto:jczajka@mathematica-mpr.com). **The application deadline for this year's award is April 1, 2012.**

The other two members of the 2012 Wray Jackson Smith Scholarship Committee are Polly Phipps and Linda Gage. Applications will be evaluated on the following criteria: relevance of the proposed activity to government statistics, quality of the proposed activity, innovation/ingenuity of the proposed project, feasibility of completion of the activity, the applicant's career stage, and past performance as reflected in the letters of recommendation. **The award winner will be announced by June 1, 2012.** All applicants will be notified by e-mail.

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NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR JEANNE E. GRIFFITH MENTORING AWARD

Submitted by Clyde Tucker, 2012 Chair, Griffith Award Selection Committee

It's time to start thinking about nominating an outstanding supervisor, technical director, team coordinator, or other member of a governmental statistical staff who encourages mentoring of junior staff in the Federal, State, or Local statistical system for the 2012 Jeanne E. Griffith Mentoring Award. **Nominations must be submitted no later than April 2, 2012.**



Jeanne Griffith

The Jeanne E. Griffith Mentoring Award was established to honor Dr. Griffith who died in August 2001 after working for more than 25 years in the Federal statistical system. Throughout her career, and especially in her latter senior management positions at the National Center for Education Statistics and the National Science Foundation, one of Jeanne's highest priorities was to mentor and encourage younger staff at all levels to learn, to grow, and to recognize and seize career opportunities as they came along.

The winning mentor(s) will be selected for his or her efforts in supporting the work and developing the careers of junior 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.

The previous recipients of the Jeanne E. Griffith Mentoring Award are: Rich Allen (National Agriculture Statistical Service), 2003; Beth Kilss (Internal Revenue Service), 2004; Renee Miller (Energy Information Administration), 2005; Martin O'Connell (U.S. Census Bureau), 2006; Stephanie Shipp (National Institute of Standards and Technology – at the time of the award), 2007; Rosemary D. Marcuss (Bureau of Economic Analysis), 2008; Kevin Cecco (Internal Revenue Service), Lillian S. Lin (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), 2009; Deborah H. Griffin (U.S. Bureau of the Census), 2010; and Jenise L. Swall (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency), 2011.

The last date for submission of nominations is **April 2, 2012**, and the Award Committee will make its determination of the award winner by **April 30, 2012**. The award will consist of a

\$1,000 honorarium (to be split if there is more than one awardee), a citation, and a plaque, which will be presented at a ceremony arranged by the co-sponsors in **June 2012**.

The nomination package must be mailed or emailed **no later than April 2, 2012**, to:

The Jeanne E. Griffith Mentoring Award Committee
c/o The American Statistical Association
732 N. Washington Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-1943
rick@amstat.org

Sponsors of the Award: The Government Statistics Section (GSS) of the American Statistical Association manages the award. GSS would like to thank our co-sponsors:

- National Opinion Research Center (NORC),
- Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics (COPAFS),
- American Institutes for Research (AIR),
- American Educational Research Association (AERA), and
- Interagency Council on Statistical Policy (ICSP).

Please contact Stephanie Shipp (sshipp@ida.org), if you would like to contribute to the award.

For more information about the nominating process for the 2012 award, please go to:
<http://www.amstat.org/sections/sgovt/JEGform12.doc> or <http://www.amstat.org/sections/sgovt/JEGform12.pdf>. If you have questions about the award, please contact **Rick Peterson** at rick@amstat.org or (703) 684-1221, and **Clyde Tucker** at nctucker@cox.net or 703-989-1334.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Transitioning to the New American FactFinder: Half-day Training **NEW!**

Data and time:

April 25, 2012

12:30pm – 3:30pm

Location:

Bureau of Labor Statistics Conference Center

2 Massachusetts Ave NE

Washington, DC 20212

(Bring a photo ID.)

The American FactFinder is the primary vehicle used by the U.S. Census Bureau to disseminate survey and census results to data users. The Census Bureau released a new version of the American FactFinder in 2011 and eliminated the legacy system in early 2012. The functionality and organization of the new American FactFinder differs markedly from the legacy system.

This training, designed by the Census Bureau, will provide an overview of the new American FactFinder using live demonstrations. We expect this session to help seasoned legacy system users gain confidence in this transition and new data users learn about this powerful data access tool. We will include applications to access information from the 2010 Census and the American Community Survey. Census Bureau staff will share shortcuts and tips. We will allow sufficient time to answer specific questions from session participants.

Note that this training session is free but by reservation only and capacity is limited. We will schedule a second training session if registration interest exceeds available seating.

To register:

To be placed on the seminar attendance list at the Bureau of Labor Statistics you need to e-mail your name, affiliation, and seminar name to wss_seminar@bls.gov (underscore after 'wss') or call 202-691-7524 and leave a message by **noon April 18, 2012**.

GOVERNMENT STATISTICS SECTION

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.

OFFICERS AND CONTACTS

Brian A. Harris-Kojetin

Chair, 2012

Brian_A._Harris-Kojetin@omb.eop.gov

Kennon Copeland

Council of Sections Representative, 2010-2012

Copeland-Kennon@norc.org

Lisa M. Blumerman

Chair-elect, 2012

lisa.m.blumerman@census.gov

Robert Lussier

COPAFS Representative, 2011-2012

RobertMLussier@videotron.ca

Steven P. Paben

Past Chair, 2012

Paben.Steven@BLS.gov

John S. Dixon

COPAFS Representative, 2012-2013

Dixon.John@BLS.gov

Daniell S. Toth

Program Chair, 2012

Toth.Daniell@bls.gov

Sonya Vartivarian

Publications Officer, 2007-2012

VartivarianS@gao.gov

Eric Rancourt

Program Chair-elect, 2012

Eric.Rancourt@statcan.gc.ca

Natalya Verbitsky-Savitz

Newsletter Editor, 2009-2012

NVSavitz@Mathematica-MPR.com

Kevin Cecco

Secretary/Treasurer, 2011-2012

kevin.cecco@irs.gov

Bill Wong

Assistant Editor, *Amstat Online*

bjwg@yahoo.com

Rick Peterson

Staff Liaison

Rick@amstat.org

Tai Phan

GSSLIST Coordinator

Tai.Phan@ed.gov

2010 GSS CORPORATE SPONSORS

Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), U.S. Department of Commerce
Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), U.S. Department of Labor
Division of Science Resources Statistics (SRS), National Science Foundation (NSF)
National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Statistics of Income Division, Internal Revenue Service (IRS)
U.S. Census Bureau
U.S. Social Security Administration

2011 GSS CORPORATE SPONSORS

Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), U.S. Department of Commerce
Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), U.S. Department of Justice
Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), U.S. Department of Labor
National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (formerly SRS), NSF

SOCIAL STATISTICS SECTION

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.

OFFICERS AND CONTACTS

Joseph Salvo

Chair, 2012

JSalvo@planning.nyc.gov

Natalya Verbitsky-Savitz

Secretary/Treasurer, 2012-2013

NVSavitz@mathematica-mpr.com

Linda A. Jacobsen

Chair-elect, 2012

ljacobsen@prb.org

Robert Santos

Council of Sections Representative, 2010-2012

RSantos@urban.org

John Thompson

Past Chair, 2012

Thompson-John@norc.org

Joanna M. Turner

Publications Officer, 2011-2012

turn0053@umn.edu

Elizabeth Stuart

Program Chair, 2012

estuart@jhsph.edu

Rick Peterson

Staff Liaison

Rick@amstat.org

Deborah H. Griffin

Program Chair-elect, 2012

deborah.h.griffin@census.gov