

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

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**2006 JOINT STATISTICAL MEETINGS**

**August 6 - 10, 2006, Seattle, Washington**

See you there!

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**Government Statistics Section**

**FIRST INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS DATA COLLECTION WORKSHOP A SUCCESS!!**

*By Diane K. Willimack, Workshop Organising Committee Member*



The First International Workshop on Business Data Collection Methodology was held in London on April 19-21, 2006, hosted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) of the United Kingdom. The Workshop targeted statisticians and methodologists who are actively involved in or have

direct oversight of research or development activities associated with business survey data collection. Its purpose was to bring together researchers and experts in data collection methods for business surveys to exchange information, aiming for the development of current best practices, the improvement of expertise, and the consolidation of knowledge.

This goal was well achieved by 29 representatives from 12 different countries, who spent 3 days identifying common issues in surveys of businesses and organizations, and sharing solutions and strategies for improvements. Participants came from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Kosovo, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. They represented 16 national statistical institutes, including six different US statistical agencies, and four universities.



*Workshop participants came from 12 different countries.*

Less formal than a conference, the Workshop's format provided opportunities for open discussion of current research, research in progress, unanswered questions, hands-on experiences, even mistakes and pitfalls. The scope of the Workshop focused on topics related to business survey data collection methodology, rather than the subjects associated with sampling and statistical methodology covered in many formal professional conferences. The Workshop addressed emerging themes related to the collection of business data from primary and secondary sources, a list that includes:

- Design and testing of data collection instruments, data collection modes, contact strategies, data collection procedures, multi-mode data collection and associated processing issues, and other primary data collection issues.
- Issues related to nonresponse, e.g., unit or item nonresponse, nonresponse reduction.
- Issues related to data quality, e.g., use of previously reported or historic data, data editing and cleaning.
- Use of secondary data sources for statistical purposes, e.g., analysis of registers and administrative data, matching, data quality assessment, combining data from primary and secondary sources, comparability of variables and concepts.

After participants were welcomed by Cynthia Clark, ONS Director of Methodology, the Workshop opened with a keynote presentation by Jacqui Jones, ONS, on "Data Collection Problems in

Business Surveys.” The remainder of the first day was devoted to reports from each National Statistics Institute (NSI) describing the placement of business survey methodology in the organization’s structure and “hot topics” each is currently dealing with. The day was filled with lively discussion, as all participants recognized much common ground and many shared concerns.

The highlight of the Workshop’s second day was an invited address by Professor Don Dillman of Washington State University, who spoke about “Making the Connection between Visual Design Concepts and Usability Principles to Improve Response to Business Surveys.” Participants eagerly picked Professor Dillman’s brain for experience and advice having practical applications to the design of business surveys.

Nearly every participant presented a 15-minute talk, ending with questions, topics or issues for discussion and feedback. Sessions covered a number of themes related to business data collection methodology and practices. Topics included were “Response Error and Questionnaire Testing,” “Questionnaire Design and Development,” “Nonresponse Reduction and Multi-Mode Collection,” and “Use of Administrative Data.”

Workshop participants were intrigued by the talks presented by Boris Lorenc at the University of Stockholm and Maarten De Waele at the University Leuven in Belgium, who are conducting research on the response process and the role of the survey respondent in the business environment. Attendees also enjoyed informal networking and socializing during a Workshop dinner outing.

A number of common issues emerged during the presentations and group discussions, including

- Developing user-friendly questionnaires
- Development of Web surveys and the interaction between electronic and paper questionnaires
- Costs of developing the infrastructure for electronic data collection
- Automating instrument design using meta-data
- Trade-offs between standardization and tailoring of survey questions
- Company-centric data collection methods
- Achieving better communication and improved interfaces between survey organizations and businesses
- The role of gatekeepers in business surveys
- Improving our understanding of businesses and the structure and content of their records and data systems
- Nonresponse reduction techniques
- Response burden, its measurement and implications for response and data quality
- Use of previously reported data during data collection
- Use of data from administrative sources in lieu of primary data collection



*Ville Tolkki, from Statistics Finland, addressing the participants.*

One of the most provocative discussions among Workshop participants regarded the role of survey methodology in their organizations and the importance of well-trained professional staff. Many of the NSIs represented at the Workshop are working to integrate perspectives and practices from survey methodology into business survey planning and production cycles. Several attendees described training activities and strategies used by their organizations to disseminate knowledge of methodological principles and best practices throughout survey programs.

The Workshop closed with a dialogue about the primary business data collection issues identified during the meetings, and the major insights participants would take away. Participants were also encouraged to organize sessions and prepare abstracts for the upcoming Third International Conference on Establishment Surveys, to be held in Montreal on June 18-21, 2007. In addition, they offered ideas and suggestions for the Second International Workshop on Business Data Collection Methodology, with a tentative date of April 2008. Plans are to convene Workshops approximately every 18 months thereafter.

Most importantly, the Workshop provided a setting where networks were forged among business survey methodologists from around the world, and connections were achieved among colleagues working on similar issues. Congratulations for a successful Workshop goes to all of its participants and to its organizers Ger Snijders from Statistics Netherlands, Gustav Haraldsen from Statistics Norway, Jacqui Jones from the Office for National Statistics of the UK, and Diane Willimack from the U.S. Census Bureau.

**Additional information about the periodic International Workshops for Business Data Collection Methodology can be obtained at [www.ssb.no/bdcmethods](http://www.ssb.no/bdcmethods) or by e-mailing Ger Snijders at [gsk@cbs.nl](mailto:gsk@cbs.nl).**

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### **Social Statistics Section**

#### **MEET THE SOCIAL STATISTICS SECTION**

*By Beth Kilss, Publications Officer*

Welcome to the section news column for the Social Statistics Section! If you're someone looking to join a section for the first time, we hope you'll take a few minutes to read this column and that by the time you do, you'll be ready to register to join. We think you'll agree that it's definitely easier to make a decision if you know what we're about. So please read on, and if we're a good match for you, the information about how to register may be found at the end of the article.

### **Who We Are**

Social Statistics Section (SSS) members are linked by common concerns focused on both the qualitative and quantitative measurement of social issues and trends, development of statistical models, and analysis of social phenomena. We study income and poverty, demographic characteristics, family composition, health, education, employment, and retirement. Our history began with such distinguished ASA members as the legendary Florence Nightingale and Mollie Orshansky, who pioneered the evolving U.S. definition of poverty.

SSS members come from many fields--demography, sociology, and psychology. We represent many disciplines--economics, education, health, history, and statistics. We also work in many sectors--private consulting firms; Federal, State, and local governments; research institutes; and academia.

### **SSS 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.

### **What We Do**

One of our major activities is organizing invited and contributed sessions for the annual Joint Statistical Meetings (JSM). We also arrange roundtables. Participating in the JSM sessions enables our members to keep up with the latest achievements and findings in our field. It also provides an opportunity to meet other professionals in order to stimulate collaboration and exchange of ideas.

The SSS also sponsors students to attend the JSM. With the Government Statistics and Survey Research Methods Sections, SSS sponsors a student paper competition where winners present their papers at a special JSM session.

### **How We Reach Out**

We are always looking for ways to interact with organizations that have similar goals. This helps us to assess the future direction of social statistics. As an example, at JSM 2006, SSS partnered with the Population Association of America on the topic-contributed panel, The Promise and Potential of the American Community Survey.

We also maintain strong ties with other ASA Sections, especially the Government Statistics Section and the Section on Survey Research Methods. We publish a joint newsletter and have a special discounted joint membership with the Government Statistics Section.

We also share 20 years of common history and co-sponsor numerous awards with both these Sections. These efforts include SSS members serving on the following awards committees: the Roger Herriot Award for Innovation in Federal Statistics, the Wray Jackson Smith Scholarship, and the Jeanne E. Griffith Mentoring Award.

On the international front, we discuss issues faced by other nations in health, demographics, and refugee matters. We have contact with the International Statistical Institute and keep SSS

members informed through newsletters, columns in *Amstat News* (like the one you are reading now), and on our Web site: [www.amstat.org/sections/ssoc/](http://www.amstat.org/sections/ssoc/).

### **What We Are Planning**

We are already working on a dynamic program for JSM 2007. We will also be organizing continuing education courses, paying JSM registration for student paper competition winners, and collaborating with outside organizations sharing common interests. We hope you will want to be part of that process.

### **What You Can Do**

Section members have access to all of these materials and activities. We need your help to establish agendas for future meetings and to develop courses, workshops, and tutorials featured at these meetings.

Are you involved in statistical analysis of social and socioeconomic issues in the United States or abroad? Are you concerned about measurement, statistical models, and analysis issues in the field of social statistics? Please contact us, and you will find many with similar interests. Your ideas and concerns can help us shape this Section's programs.

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If you share our interests, we encourage you to join the Social Statistics Section today. To join, access the ASA Chapter and Section Membership Application at – [www.amstat.org/membership/chapsection.pdf](http://www.amstat.org/membership/chapsection.pdf). We look forward to hearing from you!

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### **TRY OUT THE STATISTICS OF INCOME TABLE WIZARD**

For the next 2 months, the Statistics of Income (SOI) Division of the Internal Revenue Service will be testing the prototype SOI Table Wizard. This tool will allow users to create their own custom tables from SOI tabulated data. This prototype uses data from the 1999 and 2000 *Corporation Source Books*, but, if adopted, data from other forms may be added.

In addition, the prototype features redesigned navigation for presenting published *Corporation Source Book* tables and examples of metadata that can be used to better understand the information presented in the tables.

Even if you are not a corporate data user, please give this new application a try at: <http://soitablewizard.altaplana.com>. Afterwards, please provide feedback to us by taking the survey available on the prototype site or by contacting us through the Tax Stats pages on [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) : <http://www.irs.gov/taxstats/page/0,id=16804,00.html>. Your feedback will help determine whether or not this technology is permanently adopted on Tax Stats.

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## NEWS FROM THE ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC DATA USERS

### October Conference Plans Firming Up

The APDU Board and conference planning group are working hard to finalize plans for their annual conference, to be held on October 5-6, 2006, at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Alexandria, VA.

Now is the time to make your plans to attend. The agenda includes sessions on OMB statistical policy, income data, new innovative data sources, experiences with merging survey and administrative data, and updates on the American Community Survey and the 2010 census. Details are available at the APDU web site: [www.apdu.org](http://www.apdu.org), with new information being posted frequently.

It's not too early to register. **The deadline for receiving the conference rate at the hotel is September 5, and early registration fees expire on September 15.** The registration form can be downloaded from the web site.

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## OPEN FOR REGISTRATION: U.S. FEDERAL STATISTICS AS A SYSTEM September 25, 2006

*Registration Deadline: September 11, 2006*

*Information: <https://projects.isr.umich.edu/jpsm/materials/2006-0925.html>*

*Lists, registration, payment and cancellation: <https://projects.isr.umich.edu/jpsm/>*

*Sponsor Affiliate List: <https://projects.isr.umich.edu/jpsm/sponsorlist.cfm>*

*JPSM Home Page: [www.jpsm.org](http://www.jpsm.org) Click on "Short Courses"*

*Phone: (301)314-7911, email: [course@survey.umd.edu](mailto:course@survey.umd.edu)*

### U.S. FEDERAL STATISTICS AS A SYSTEM

A one-day short course sponsored by the Joint Program in Survey Methodology

September 25, 2006

Presented at the Hyatt Regency in Bethesda, MD

**Katharine G. Abraham** - Joint Program in Survey Methodology, University of Maryland

**Robert M. Groves** - Joint Program in Survey Methodology, University of Michigan

### Topics And Approach

#### *Motivation*

This is a course for new employees of Federal statistical agencies or anyone else who wants to learn more about how the various Federal statistical agencies work collectively to provide needed information to the



citizens of the United States. Even if you know how some piece of the statistical system works, you may feel poorly informed about how the system as a whole functions.

What is the Federal Statistical System? We answer this question with reference to the history, activities, outputs and customers of the 70 plus Federal agencies whose responsibilities include the production of statistical information, focusing especially on the dozen or so agencies whose principal mission is to provide such information. How the agencies adapt to changing circumstances is an important theme, illustrated by the redesign of the household survey used to produce the monthly unemployment rate, the development and implementation of the new North American Industry Classification system and other examples. Mechanisms for coordination among the statistical agencies and between the United States and other countries are covered. We conclude with a discussion of the enduring debates over centralization versus decentralization of the statistical system, agency principles and practices, privacy and confidentiality and other issues regarding the organization and functioning of the system.

### **Instructors**

Katharine G. Abraham is a professor in the Joint Program in Survey Methodology and holds an adjunct appointment in the Department of Economics at the University of Maryland. Abraham served from 1993 through 2001 as Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and her research has included work on a variety of economic measurement issues.

Robert M. Groves is a research professor at the Joint Program in Survey Methodology and the director of the University of Michigan Survey Research Center. Groves has extensive experience in research and teaching on a wide range of survey methodology issues.

### **Tentative Schedule**

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 8:00 - 9:00   | Check In   |
| 9:00 - 10:15  | What is the U.S. Federal statistical system?   |
| 10:15 - 10:30 | Break  |
| 10:30 - 12:00 | Snapshots of social and economic reality: Learning about the Federal statistical system through its major programs |
| 12:00 - 1:00  | Lunch  |
| 1:00 - 2:30   | Keeping the picture in focus   |
| 2:30 - 2:45   | Break  |
| 2:45 - 3:30   | Continuity and change in the Federal statistical system  |
| 3:30 - 4:30   | Inventing the future great debates   |

### **Location**

The course will be held at the Hyatt Regency Bethesda, One Bethesda Metro Center, at Wisconsin Avenue and Old Georgetown Road in Bethesda, Maryland. The hotel is in the heart of Maryland's high-tech corridor, just 6 miles from downtown Washington, D.C., with convenient access to the Capital Beltway and the Metro subway system. The Hyatt is accessible via the Metro Red Line at the Bethesda Metro stop. A map will be sent with your registration confirmation. For overnight room reservations, call the Hyatt Regency Bethesda at 301-657-1234. There is a parking garage located directly underneath the Hotel which offers both valet and self-parking. The garage is not owned or operated by the Hyatt Regency.

[http://www.hyatt.com/usa/bethesda/hotels/map\\_bethe.html](http://www.hyatt.com/usa/bethesda/hotels/map_bethe.html)

### **Fees & Course Materials**

The registration fee is \$400. Full-time university students (with a supervising faculty advisor's signature) and employees of JPSM sponsor/affiliate organizations are eligible for a reduced fee of \$300.

Lunch and refreshments are included in the fee. Participants will be provided with a notebook containing detailed course notes.



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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 Resort, Gatineau, Quebec (10 minutes from downtown Ottawa)

#### **Registration and Preliminary Program Announcement**

<http://www.statcan.ca/english/conferences/symposium2006>

This international event addresses statistical methodology issues relevant to the work of a government statistical agency, as well as to a broader statistical community in the health care industry, government, universities, and other research organizations. The Symposium will focus on methodological issues related to producing reliable information on population health. The first day is comprised of two concurrent workshops, while the second and third days will each start with a plenary session followed by two streams of parallel sessions.

**For more information, send e-mail inquiries to [symposium2006@statcan.ca](mailto:symposium2006@statcan.ca) , or contact Milorad Kovacevic by phone at 613-951-9891 or by e-mail at [Milorad.Kovacevic@statcan.ca](mailto: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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