

GSS/SSS NOVEMBER 2005 NEWSLETTER
Government Statistics and Social Statistics Sections
American Statistical Association

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Government Statistics Section

An Invitation to Producers and Users of Government Data at All Levels

By John L. Czajka and Daniel Kasprzyk

In its promotional brochure, the Government Statistics Section (GSS) declares that its purpose 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.” Because governments in the U.S. and abroad produce such a wide range of data—from national censuses down to small, specialized surveys—that attract an even broader range of users, the GSS draws members from all sectors of the ASA. This article recaps the origins of the section in order to provide background for a discussion of the current membership and the scope of the section’s activities. We hope that readers who are not currently members of the section will find reason to explore joining the section when they renew their ASA membership.

Origins of the GSS

The GSS was established as an ASA section on January 1, 1989. A formal proposal for the new section was submitted to the ASA Board of Directors in 1987. Ed Spar and the late Wray Smith appeared before the Board in December 1987 to speak on behalf of the proposal, which the Board approved, pending the outcome of a membership vote. Under the rules that were in place at the time, 5 percent of the ASA membership had to indicate a willingness to join a new section before that section could be established. In July 1988, the section met this requirement when approximately 1,100 ASA members—about 350 more than needed—submitted ballots indicating that they would be willing to become members of a new section on government statistics. As

reported in the first GSS newsletter, a sample survey of those who actually joined the new section members found that 31 percent were federal government employees. Nearly the same fraction—30 percent—was from academia. About 4 percent were from state and local government while the balance came from business and industry and the nonprofit sector or were students, self-employed, retired, or from outside the U.S.

As a new section, the GSS combined the interests of two long-standing ASA committees: the Committee on Subnational Statistics (formerly the Committee on Small Area Data) and the Committee on Government Statistics. With the establishment of the new section, the two committees were reconstituted within the GSS as subcommittees. Both were assigned new names to more clearly reflect their interests. The Committee on Subnational Statistics became the Subcommittee on State and Local Statistics while the Committee on Government Statistics became the Subcommittee on Federal Statistical Systems.

Early Focus on State and Local Government Statisticians

Reflecting the committee origins of the section, the first chair, the late Evelyn Mann, was a statistician for the city of New York. While state and local statisticians were a small minority of the section's initial membership, this population had been a focus of ASA recruitment efforts for a number of years, and it was only natural that this interest should carry over to the new section. As reported by Lorraine Amico in the June 1991 newsletter, the Subcommittee on State and Local Statistics estimated that between 25,000 and 75,000 state government employees held positions with responsibilities that included information or statistics. Moved by the growth potential that was inherent in these numbers, the section developed an outreach plan that was based on meeting the needs identified in a survey of state and local government statisticians in three states. These needs included training, technical assistance, and an ability to exchange information with peers in other government agencies.

Who Are Our Members Today?

A review of the electronic and surface mail address information supplied by our 762 members shows that the section continues to draw a broad cross-section of ASA members. While U.S. federal government employees remain the largest subgroup, representing at least 28 percent of the total membership, the section draws more than 21 percent of its membership from academic faculty and staff (both U.S. and foreign) and a comparable share from business and industry (including nonprofits). Students represent the next largest group, accounting for about 13 percent of the membership. Despite the early outreach efforts described above, U.S. state and local government statisticians continue to account for only about 4 percent of the membership, with statisticians employed by foreign national governments and the United Nations adding another 3 percent. International members, excluding those in academia and government, represent another 3 percent of the total, while the remaining 7 percent include retirees as well as those who could not be allocated to specific sectors because our membership records include only home mailing and email addresses.

Strengths of the Section

The vitality of the GSS is evidenced by the strength and continuing growth of its program at the Joint Statistical Meetings. In recent years the GSS has ranked as high as third among all sections in the number of papers published in the JSM Proceedings. For several years now the GSS has been able to provide a session in every time slot. An ASA member submitting a contributed paper to the GSS program can be reasonably confident of being placed in a session with one or more closely related papers. Another measure of our vitality is the recent expansion of our newsletter (produced jointly with Social Statistics) to a monthly, electronic publication schedule, with accompanying articles in the *Amstat News*. Between the newsletter and the GSS list serve, section members can be assured of being kept up to date on section activities.

A Special Invitation to Students

In August the section's Executive Committee voted to reduce the dues for students to the amount that ASA collects from the section for each member. Effective January 1, 2006, students will be able to join or renew for just \$1. For the same price, students can also obtain a joint membership in the GSS and the Social Statistics Section and get the benefits of two section memberships for the price of one. We encourage students to consider joining the GSS to become more familiar with the wide array of data that governments collect and disseminate and to explore future options for employment. We also urge students to become better acquainted with the awards that the section cosponsors with Social Statistics—specifically, the Wray Jackson Smith Scholarship and the student paper competition (also cosponsored with the Survey Research Methods Section). Both awards provide funding and recognition that will benefit the development of a career in statistics.

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## Social Statistics Section

### Singing in the Choir

by Beth Kilss, Publications Officer

Last January, the cover of *Amstat News* asked the question “Who is the ASA?” In the President's Corner of that issue, ASA President Fritz Scheuren began the article by reflecting on the ASA mission statement, which you can readily find on the opening page of every issue of *Amstat News*. Permit me to borrow that theme for this month's Social Statistics Section (SSS) news to answer the question “Who is the Social Statistics Section?” especially for those who are considering joining. And allow me also to use a choir analogy to encourage everyone – members and those thinking of becoming members to make a commitment to support ASA and this section, or if not this section, another one (or more!).

Being a member of a choir myself for many, many years, I know the importance of regularly attending and faithfully supporting the organization, of coming to choir practice, and being loyal to the group. So, too, does this apply to a professional organization, especially a huge organization like ASA. The size of the organization alone can intimidate. However, joining a smaller group that is related to the larger organization, especially one where you have something in common with the other members, allows you to more comfortably contribute your time and talents.

Those of you may already regularly attend “choir practice” -- the Joint Statistical Meetings, the annual Business Meeting and Mixer sponsored by the Social Statistics Section (SSS), invited or contributed sessions organized by SSS, or any activity sponsored by ASA or SSS. If so, you probably have had repeated exposure and already know what we're all about and maybe this column is, then, just “preaching to the choir.” On the chance, however, that many of our readers enjoy “music” in general (statistics) but don't know the “lyrics to the song,” or want to “learn a new tune,” this column may be for you.

To help teach you a new melody, the following selected description was taken from the recently updated Social Statistics brochure:

#### 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.*

## **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 of advocacy 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.

## **What We Do**

One of our major activities is organizing invited and contributed paper sessions for the annual Joint Statistical Meetings (JSM). We also arrange luncheon 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. And we are considering sponsoring workshops or seminars that would be of interest to our membership.

## **How We Reach Out**

We are always looking for ways to interact with organizations that have similar goals. These include the American Sociological Association (the other "ASA"), the Population Association of America, the American Educational Research Association, and the American Economic Association. This helps us to assess the future direction of social statistics.

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 the Roger Herriot Award for Innovation in Federal Statistics, the Wray Jackson Smith Scholarship, the Jeanne E. Griffith Mentoring Award, and student paper awards.

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*, and on our Web site: [www.amstat.org/sections/ssoc/](http://www.amstat.org/sections/ssoc/).

## **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.

Feel like singing in THIS choir? *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)

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ICES-III Is Now Accepting Proposals for Invited Paper Sessions

The Third International Conference on Establishment Surveys (ICES-III)

Where: Hyatt Regency Montréal, Montréal, Québec, Canada

When: June 18-21, 2007

ICES-III is now accepting proposals for invited sessions. Submission started on September 1 and will close on December 1, 2005. If you or any of your colleagues have proposals for invited sessions, please submit them on the template on the Invited Program page on the ICES-III web site:

<http://www.amstat.org/meetings/ices/2007/index.cfm?fuseaction=invited>

Submissions should be sent to ices3@census.gov. **Organizers will be notified by the end of February, 2006, if their proposals have been accepted.** For further conference information, please visit the ICES-III web site:

<http://www.amstat.org/meetings/ices/2007/index.cfm>

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## 2006 Student Paper Competition Sponsored by a Consortium of Sections

The Social Statistics, Government Statistics, and Survey Research Methods Sections are pleased to announce a competition for student and postgraduate papers to be presented at the Joint Statistical Meetings (JSM) in Seattle, Washington on August 6-10, 2006. At least five awards will be granted. Winning papers are presented by the authors at a session of the meeting and are recognized at the Sections' business meetings. A subsidy of up to \$800 is provided to each winner in order to cover JSM 2006 expenses. Faculty are urged to encourage students to apply for these awards

To be eligible to participate in the competition you must be a current undergraduate or graduate student at any level or be a 2006 graduate who presents research conducted as a student.

**Applications must be received by December 15, 2005. Winners will be notified in early January 2006 and must register for the meetings by January 31, 2006.**

Papers entered in the Student Competition must involve either a new statistical methodology or a creative application of statistical analysis to a problem, policy question, or other issue in the subject area of one of the sponsoring sections. Research for the submitted papers does not have to be complete, but competitors must be able to submit an abstract prospectus describing the planned research, including the nature of the intended innovations.

Applications should include:

- (1) a cover letter including name, current affiliation and status, and contact information (address, telephone, e-mail) of the applicant,
- (2) an abstract of up to 300 words,
- (3) a draft paper if available, or otherwise a 3-page research prospectus, and
- (4) a letter from the adviser certifying student status (or completion of degree within the past year) and describing plans for the completion of the research.

Refer to the Section websites for a copy of this announcement and for updates.

Social Statistics - <http://www.amstat.org/sections/ssoc/>

Government Statistics - <http://www.amstat.org/sections/sgovt/>

Survey Research Methods - <http://www.amstat.org/sections/SRMS/index.html>

**Send applications to [Michael.Cohen@dot.gov](mailto:Michael.Cohen@dot.gov) If you do not have access to email, please call Michael P. Cohen, 2006 Program Chair for the Government Statistics Section, at (202) 366-9949 to make arrangements.**

**NOTE:** A student who receives an award from more than one section must immediately inform both sections, and will be asked to decline one of the awards.

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DC-AAPOR Student Paper Competition

The Washington-Baltimore Chapter of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (DC-AAPOR) invites entries to its second annual Student Paper Competition. The competition is intended to recognize excellence in scholarly research by area students, and to encourage active student participation in the chapter.

Criteria

DC-AAPOR welcomes papers in any field related to the study of public opinion, broadly defined, including research on (a) theoretical issues in the formation and change of public opinion, (b) the theory and methods of survey or market research, and (c) the use of statistical techniques in the design, adjustment, or analysis of survey data. Papers should be approximately 15 to 25 pages in length, and will be judged based on the quality of research design, originality, significance, organization, and presentation. Last year's winning paper and honorable mentions are available at <http://www.dc-aapor.org/studentpaper2004.php>.

Eligibility

The competition is open to all current graduate and undergraduate students, and to those who have received their degree within the last calendar year. Faculty co-authors are acceptable, with the stipulation that an eligible student must be first author. Eligibility is limited to students attending or graduated from an accredited college or university in Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, or Washington, DC, OR to students whose primary residence is in one of those areas. Previous membership in DC-AAPOR is not required, but non-members must become members in order to be eligible (the student membership fee is \$6). Submitted papers may not have been published or presented elsewhere.

Award

The author(s) of the winning paper will be awarded the choice of full lodging expenses paid at AAPOR's Annual Conference in Montreal, Quebec (May 18-21, 2006), or a cash prize of \$300. For multiple student authors on a winning paper, the award will be divided among the eligible authors. Additionally, the author(s) of the winning paper will be awarded a guaranteed spot on the Conference Program to present their paper at the Annual Conference in Montreal.

Review Committee

The winning paper and honorable mentions will be selected by a review committee composed of survey and public opinion researchers drawn from the commercial, government, and nonprofit sectors. See <http://www.dc-aapor.org/studentpaper.php> for a complete list of review committee members.

Paper Submission

To be considered for the award, **please send an electronic copy of your paper to Adam Safir** <<mailto:asafir@rti.org>> **by December 16, 2005**. Include your name, academic affiliation, mailing address, telephone number, and e-mail address. You will receive confirmation that your paper has been received. The winning paper will be announced on or before January 23, 2006.

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## Memorial Service for Edwin D. Goldfield (1918-2005)

On Wednesday, November 30, 2005 remarks will be offered by: Constance Citro, Miron Straf, Margaret Martin, Charles Louis Kincannon, Joseph Waksberg, and Harold Greenwald, honoring the life of Edwin D. Goldfield, "Limitless Fount of Census Knowledge and History; Colleague, Friend, Athlete, and Sports Statistician" --

- U.S. Census Bureau, 1940-1975
- Committee on National Statistics, 1975-1987
- Lifetime Member, American Statistical Association
- Lifetime Member, Washington Statistical Society
- Lifetime Member, Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics

*Friends and colleagues in attendance will be invited to contribute their remembrances.*

**Time:** 3:30 – 4:30 pm, reception immediately following  
**Location:** Members' Room, The National Academies Main Building, 2100 C St NW, Washington, DC  
**Metro:** Nearest stop is Foggy Bottom (Blue/Orange Line)  
**Parking:** Limited parking is available at the entrance on 21<sup>st</sup> Street  
**RSVP:** Agnes Gaskin ([agaskin@nas.edu](mailto:agaskin@nas.edu), 202-334-2240)

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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*

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