

GSS/SSS DECEMBER 2005 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)

IN THIS ISSUE:

- **READING OF INTEREST: REVISIONS TO TWO KEY STATISTICAL AGENCY GUIDEBOOKS AND FREAKS IN THE RANKS?**
- **DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN!**
- **2006 STUDENT PAPER COMPETITION SPONSORED BY A CONSORTIUM OF SECTIONS**
- **STUDENT PAPER PRIZE - LONGITUDINAL SURVEYS**
- **ANNOUNCING THE 23RD INTERNATIONAL METHODOLOGY SYMPOSIUM**
- **DC-AAPOR STUDENT PAPER COMPETITION**

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**Government Statistics Section**

**READING OF INTEREST: REVISIONS TO TWO KEY STATISTICAL AGENCY GUIDEBOOKS AND FREAKS IN THE RANKS?**

*By Shelly Ver Ploeg*

In the past few years two key books outlining the foundations and practices of how statistical agencies should operate have been revised and updated. In 2003, the United Nations Statistics Division published the *Handbook of Statistical Organization, Third Edition: The Operation and Organization of a Statistical Agency*. And in 2001, the Committee on National Statistics of the National Academies published the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Principles and Practices of a Federal Statistical Agency*. While these two holy grails of those in the business of government statistics have different audiences and different goals, their underlying messages are quite the same.

The U.N. *Handbook* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition is an update of the 1980 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. This handbook covers fundamentals of national systems of official statistics: general principles, data collection and respondent policies, principles of organization and management, and dissemination guidelines. Although the handbook is targeted to those charged with running statistical agencies and chief statisticians, others with an interest in how specific functions of agencies and entire statistical systems could ideally work may find the book useful as a reference. Third edition revisions include greater attention to the production of statistics as a process and as a system, addressing needs for managing information technologies, and dealing with concerns for different classes of users.

*Principles and Practices of a Federal Statistical Agency* (P&P) takes a broad view of overarching guidelines of statistical agencies. The book is targeted to a broader audience, not only for those who run statistical agencies, but also for department and policy officials, advisory committees, and others who manage and/or use the products of such agencies. The short book will leave the reader with a greater appreciation the ideals and goals for operations of statistical agencies. Those who are new to government statistics, or to those who have "been in the business" for a while and just need a reminder of "why you work" (as one large insurance company's ads say), will find it valuable, too. The second

edition does not change the three guiding principles of statistical agencies, but does revise and expand the discussion of some of the practices that characterize an effective federal statistical agency.

***Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything***

*By Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner*

Although it may seem far afield from the two statistical agency guidebooks, *Freakonomics* reinforces the importance of the power of information (and subsequently, the importance of a statistical agency's functions). The book summarizes, at a layperson's level, research by one of the co-authors and others that attempts to explain how incentives play a role in individual behavior. Trained as an economist, I was a little hesitant and too snooty to use my scarce time resources to read a layperson's book on economics. Needless to say, I was pleasantly surprised at how much I enjoyed the book. (My only caution is that only those who can stomach over-the-top hero worship of the economist co-author by the other co-author should read the introductions to each chapter. These were too much for me, and I even think economics is kinda cool.)

What struck me most about this book was not the economics at all, as many of the studies summarized come from other social science disciplines and the book even contains a few interesting history lessons in between—in this sense, the title is a bit of a misnomer. Rather, most remarkable, and even a bit inspiring, was the cleverness of the questions the researchers asked, combined with the unique sources of data they exploited to answer the questions. For example, to understand cheating, the authors summarize data meticulously compiled by a former government economist who gave up a secure job to deliver and sell bagels—entirely on the honor system—to Washington DC office buildings. The data were used to analyze honor system payment rates of different offices, what types of firms cheated (big vs. small), when (on holidays or good weather days), and even whether office morale was associated with better payment rates. In another example that illustrates the power of information on behavior, data on real estate sales were used to examine how real estate agents behave when they sell their own houses compared to when they someone else's house. Finally, to understand marketing and how people present themselves, data from internet dating sites was used to examine a number of questions about how reality matched with the profiles posted on the internet.

These are just a few examples of the studies summarized and woven together in the book. Each of the stories is interesting and raises as many questions about human behavior as they answer.



**DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN!**

*By Beth Kilss, Publications Officer*

Can you believe that it's already December? Seems like we were just telling you about all the plans for JSM 2005, and before you knew it, we were all sitting in sessions, attending business meetings, and exchanging business cards in Minneapolis. Meanwhile, while we were focused on preparing for those meetings, members of the Social Statistics Section (SSS) were already busy behind the scenes making plans for SSS activities for **JSM 2006 in Seattle**. Invited sessions were being scoped out, and now, as 2005 nears an end, new activities are well underway – some of which are solely sponsored by Social Statistics and others which are jointly sponsored with our sister section, Government Statistics.

Whew! So whether we like it or not, time continues to fly by, and now it's time to tell you about upcoming events and plans. With our membership and mission statement in mind – to advance research in social statistics which involves the use of methods of statistical inquiry, the use of statistical data, and the development of statistical measurement – our goal is to plan activities that our members want and which encourage participation in the section as well as other activities of the American Statistical Association.

We hope that by continually sharing our plans with you, your interest will be piqued and you will want to learn more about our section. And of course, we always welcome your ideas for future activities. Furthermore, we hope you'll start thinking now about getting involved and planning to attend the 2006 annual meetings in the great northwest next August. With next year's theme as our guiding framework – *Statistics for an Uncertain World: Meeting Global Challenges*—I'm sure the sessions sponsored by our section (as well as other sections) will be fascinating and worthwhile to attend.

**And In This Corner...Invited Sessions**

Well you aren't going to believe this, but planning for the 2006 invited sessions began last spring! Yes, that's right. In fact, we told you about the initial proposals in *Amstat News* last May (page 64). Invited sessions have two main benefits—they offer more time per speaker and they are designed for extensive discussion on a single theme or topic. Although the slots for invited sessions are limited, we also have the opportunity to enter other great ideas in a competition

for additional slots not yet allocated to a specific Section or Committee. Under the leadership of our 2006 Program Chair **Juanita Tamayo Lott**, nine outstanding proposals were ultimately submitted in July and recently finalized. Of these, four were selected as invited sessions:

- Challenges Facing the Next Generation of Applied Statisticians – *Kelly Zou, Organizer*
- Cross-National Research on Immigration – *Kevin Deardorff, Organizer*
- The Role of Administrative Records in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Surveys and Censuses – *Ron Prevost, Organizer*
- What Makes a Successful Career in Statistics? – *Jay Choi, Organizer*

### **You Can Never Have Too Many...Topic-Contributed Sessions**

Believe it or not, it is time now to start organizing a topic-contributed session for Social Statistics for the 2006 Joint Statistical Meetings. We welcome all new proposals, and also encourage folks to resubmit proposals that were submitted for invited sessions but were not selected. This is recycling taken to a higher level. We don't want your hard work to go to waste, so be sure to resubmit that proposal as a topic-contributed session.

Topic-contributed sessions have several appealing attributes that might be just right for your area of focus. The format of the session is flexible—you can include 4 papers and one discussant, 3 papers and 2 discussants, or you can devote the entire session to 5 papers without a discussant. It is also possible to organize a topic-contributed panel with 3 - 5 panelists. Topic-contributed sessions are often more focused, cohesive, and can cover more depth than regular contributed sessions.

If you are interested in putting together a topic-contributed session, contact Juanita Tamayo Lott, 2006 Program Chair at [juanita.t.lott@census.gov](mailto:juanita.t.lott@census.gov) or (301) 763-3127 before submitting a session for Social Statistics. Juanita encourages new and less experienced members to initiate a session.

Abstracts can be submitted online beginning **December 1, 2005**, through **February 1, 2006**, which is the deadline for submitting all abstracts other than invited ones. However, mailed in contributed abstracts are due by **January 16, 2006**.

### **Let's Do Lunch...Roundtable Luncheons**

Roundtable luncheons offer an excellent opportunity for a group of people interested in a particular topic—whether experts or not—to exchange ideas in a less formal, more interactive way than is usually feasible in a paper or panel session. What's more, roundtable luncheons are scheduled so that they do not conflict with the invited and contributed paper and panel sessions.

If you would like to lead a roundtable luncheon or if there is a topic that you would like to see discussed at a roundtable luncheon, please contact Allen Schirm, 2007 Program Chair at [aschirm@mathematica-mpr.com](mailto:aschirm@mathematica-mpr.com) or (202) 484-4686 before submitting an abstract.

Abstracts can be submitted online beginning **December 1, 2005**, and the deadline for online submission is **February 1, 2006**.

### **On Your Mark, Get Set, Go!...It's Student Paper Competition Time**

The 2006 Student Paper Competition is co-sponsored by the Social Statistics, Government Statistics, and Survey Research Methods Sections. This annual event is 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. Check out the particulars at <http://www.amstat.org/sections/sgovt/stud06an.htm> and be sure to make it to the starting line by applying by **December 15, 2005**. (For more details, also see article below on page 6.)

### **Don't Be Left Behind...Apply Now for the 2006 Wray Jackson Smith Scholarship**

The Wray Jackson Smith Scholarship (WJSS) in memory of Wray Jackson Smith, a long-time contributor to Federal statistics, is targeted at students and persons early in their career in government statistics. The Wray Jackson Smith Scholarship (WJSS), co-sponsored with the Government Statistics Section of ASA, the Washington Statistical Society, the Caucus for Women in Statistics, Harris-Smith Institutes, Mathematica Policy Research, and Synectics for Management Decisions, Inc., is intended to reward promising young statisticians for their diligence, thereby encouraging them to consider a future in government statistics. The WJSS Award provides funding of \$1,000 for use in exploring any of a broad number of opportunities for furthering the development of a career related to government statistics.

To apply for a WJSS Award, send a completed WJSS Application Form (see: <http://www.amstat.org/sections/sgovt/> for the current year's form and click on the format you want to use) to the Wray Jackson Smith Scholarship Committee, c/o Robert Groves, Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 426 Thompson Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2321 or electronically to : [bgroves@isr.umich.edu](mailto:bgroves@isr.umich.edu), by **April 15, 2006**. Announcements of the awardees are made by **June 1, 2006**. All Applicants are notified by e-mail.

### **We're Looking Out for You...**

...because your interest and involvement in the Social Statistics Section are important to us. So there you have it! Five items of interest that you and every section member and potential section member should be aware of. So remember to check this column next time for more updates on plans for JSM 2006. Upcoming issues of *Amstat News* will provide a preview of the Roundtable Luncheons we've organized, as well as our program for the 2006 JSM. There will be lots to choose from, and definitely something for everyone. Once again, if you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the sessions, feel free to contact Juanita Tamayo Lott, 2006 SSS Program Chair ([Juanita.t.lott@census.gov](mailto:Juanita.t.lott@census.gov)). See you in Seattle where it'll definitely feel like déjà vu all over again! (Didn't we just check into the hotel in Minneapolis???)

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Time is running out, but it's not too late to apply for the...

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

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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## STUDENT PAPER PRIZE - LONGITUDINAL SURVEYS

### MOLS2006, THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE METHODOLOGY OF LONGITUDINAL SURVEYS

**When:** Essex, UK

**Where:** July 2006

The conference organizers are pleased to announce that a prize will be awarded for the best paper presented at the conference by a full-time student. A panel of judges will select the best paper based both on the written paper and the presentation, with approximately equal weight given to each. To be eligible, both the first author of the paper and the presenter must be full-time students enrolled during 2005-06 in a recognized educational establishment. It is acceptable for the paper to be co-authored by the student's supervisor or other non-student.

The prize, sponsored by John Wiley and Sons, will be a set of books from the Wiley Survey Methodology <http://eu.wiley.com/WileyCDA/Section/id-2625.html> series, with a list price of over £300 (over US\$500). The winner will also receive a certificate.

To be considered for the prize, the paper must be accepted as a contributed conference paper. An abstract must be submitted by **December 19, 2005**. Additionally, a full written paper must be submitted by **May 25, 2006**, for consideration by the judges. In both the paper and presentation, we are looking for clarity of thought and of presentation and originality and relevance of the contribution. We reserve the right to request proof of student status. The prize will be awarded during the final plenary session of the conference by the conference Chair.

For more information about the prize and the conference go to: <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/mols2006/>.

Peter Lynn (plynn@essex.ac.uk)  
Professor of Survey Methodology  
Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER)  
University of Essex, Colchester, UK CO4 3SQ  
tel: +44 (0)1206 874809; fax: +44 (0)1206 873151  
<http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/>

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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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**And another reminder: it's still not too late to apply to the --**

### **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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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

Chet Bowie
Chair, 2005
chet_bowie@marketstrategies.com

Nat Schenker
Chair, 2004
nschenker@cdc.gov

Stephanie Shipp
Chair, 2006
stephanie.shipp@nist.gov

Brian Harris-Kojetin
Program Chair, 2005
bharrisk@omb.eop.gov

Michael P. Cohen
Program Chair, 2006
michael.cohen@bts.gov

John W. Hall
Secretary/Treasurer, 2005-06
jhall@mathematica-mpr.com

Daniel Kasprzyk
Council of Sections Rep, 2004-05
dkasprzyk@mathematica-mpr.com

Robert Lussier
Publications Officer, 2005-06
robert.lussier@statcan.ca

Wendy Alvey
COPAFS Rep, 2005-06
wendy.l.alvey@census.gov

John Czajka
COPAFS Rep, 2004-05
jczajka@mathematica-mpr.com

Pat Melvin
Newsletter Editor
patricia.l.melvin@census.gov

Bill Wong
Assistant Editor, *Amstat* Online
william.wong@irs.gov

Tai Phan
GSSLIST Coordinator
tai.phan@ed.gov

Monica Clark
ASA Ex Officio
monica@amstat.org

SOCIAL STATISTICS SECTION OFFICERS AND CONTACTS

Jerry Gates

Chair, 2005

gerald.w.gates@census.gov

Colm O'Muircheartaigh

Chair, 2004

colm@norc.org

Susan Schechter

Chair, 2006

susan_schechter@omb.eop.gov

Renee Miller

Program Chair, 2005

renee.miller@eia.doe.gov

Juanita Tamayo Lott

Program Chair, 2006

juanita.t.lott@census.gov

Susan Hinkins

Secretary/Treasurer, 2005

hinkins-susan@norc.org

Trivellore Raghunathan

Council of Sections Rep, 2005

teraghu@umich.edu

Beth Kilss

Publications Officer, 2005-06

beth.a.kilss@irs.gov

David Nichols

Assistant Editor, *Amstat* Online

dnichols@spss.com

Monica Clark

ASA Ex Officio

monica@amstat.org

New officers for Social Statistics:

Jennifer H. Madans

Chair 2007

jennifer.h.madans@nchs.gov

Allen L. Schirm

Program Chair 2007

aschirm@mathematica-mpr.com

Dawn VonThurn Nelson

Secretary/Treasurer 2006

dawn.v.nelson@census.gov