

THE STATISTICAL CONSULTANT



Section on Statistical Consulting
Christopher Holloman, Editor; Sarah Butler, Assistant Editor

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IN THIS ISSUE

- Special Focus: Pro Bono Consulting
- Introducing Statistics Without Borders
- Update: Statistics in the Community
- ASA Now Accepting Nominations for the W.J. Dixon Award for Excellence in Statistical Consulting
- Statistics Resource Available for Purchase
- Comments from the Past Chair
- Comments from the Chair
- Notes from the Editor

Special Focus: Pro Bono Consulting

Christopher Holloman, The Ohio State University¹

In this issue of *The Statistical Consultant*, we present two articles on *pro bono* consulting efforts being made by the statistical consulting community. In the first article, Jim Cochran provides an overview of Statistics Without Borders, a group providing statistical consulting to non-profit organizations around the world. In the second article, Meghan Honerlaw provides an update on Statistics in the Community (StatCom), the graduate student-run *pro bono* consulting program originating from Purdue University.

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Introducing Statistics Without Borders

James J. Cochran, Louisiana Tech University²

Enter the phrase *without borders* into any search engine and you will be amazed at the breadth of results. The first page of a Google search includes what one would expect - Doctors Without Borders (or Médecins Sans Frontières), Teachers Without Borders, Engineers Without Borders, Lawyers Without Borders, Builders Without Borders, MBAs Without Borders (really!). As you progress through the pages of this search, you find other interesting results - Architects Without Borders, Students Without Borders, Braille Without Borders, Sociologists Without Borders, Scientists Without Borders, Justice Without Borders – organizations of various sizes and missions, all devoted to international aid and assistance in their respective areas. The search results eventually reveal some very unexpected results - Clowns Without Borders, Geeks Without Borders, Soccer Without



Alpacas Without Borders?

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Borders, Wine Without Borders, Alpacas Without Borders. Obviously borders are of great interest to a wide variety of special interest groups!

The results of such a search will now yield a new group - *Statistics Without Borders (SWB)*! This ASA affiliated group, which now boasts nearly 100 energetic, enthusiastic, and well-qualified volunteers, has been established to provide *pro bono* statistical expertise to non-profit organizations (NPOs) that are working on problems broadly related to international health issues. The mission statement recently adopted by SWB states:

Statistics Without Borders (SWB) is an apolitical organization under the auspices of the American Statistical Association, comprised entirely of volunteers, that provides *pro bono* statistical consulting and assistance to organizations and government agencies in support of these organizations' not-for-profit efforts to deal with international health issues (broadly defined). Our vision is to achieve better statistical practice, including statistical analysis and design of experiments and surveys, so that international health projects and initiatives are delivered more effectively and efficiently.

Since its inception in October of 2008, members of SWB have been busy:

- gathering information and building a database on the pro bono interests of its members;
- holding monthly meetings of its Executive Committee to discuss various issues and strategies;
- developing its website (to be available soon);
- planning and holding its first organizational meeting during the 2009 JSM in Washington, D.C. (which was covered by Monica Hesse for the *Washington Post* in the August 5, 2009 article, "In D.C., Statisticians Flex Their Strength in Numbers" (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/08/04/AR2009080403117.html>));



SWB Volunteers at the First Organizational Meeting, 2009 JSM, Washington, D.C.

- working with the representatives of the Embassy of Madagascar to develop collaborative projects to support initiatives to improve health and college-level statistics education in Madagascar;
- establishing a Facebook presence
(www.facebook.com/pages/Statistics-without-Borders/118114963213);
- providing support for several initiatives, including:
 - helping George Washington students and staff of the Inter American Development Bank plan a survey on bottled water usage in Mexico;
 - advising the MesoAmerican Health Initiative in its planning for the evaluation of interventions in eight Central American countries;



SWB Co-Chair Gary Shapiro (first row, far left) at the MesoAmerican Health Initiative Dinner in San Jose, Costa Rica, August 2009

- assisting the Academy for Education Development in the review of evaluation plans for initiatives in two countries;
- holding *preliminary* discussions on potential collaborative efforts with:
 - CARE;
 - Engineers without Borders;
 - Mexican National Institute of Public Health (INSP);
 - International Rescue Committee;
 - XXV Foro Nacional de Estadística;
 - UNESCO;
 - American Association for the Advancement of Science;
 - Nuba Water Project;
 - Inter-American Development Bank;
- encouraging involvement by members of other professional societies such as the Operations Research Society of Eastern Africa.



**Delegates to the Operations Research of Eastern Africa International Conference,
July 2009 (SWB Co-Chair Jim Cochran, first row, second from the left)**

Do you have suggestions for projects for SWB? Perhaps you know of an NPO that is working on a health-related issue (broadly defined) and could use assistance from SWB? If so (or if you would like more information about SWB), please contact SWB Co-Chairs Gary Shapiro (g.shapiro4@verizon.net) or James J. Cochran (jcochran@cab.latech.edu).

Update: Statistics in the Community

Meghan Honerlaw, Purdue University³, and **Jonathan Hobbs**, Iowa State University⁴

The StatCom Network was founded in 2006 with support from an ASA Member Initiatives Grant. In subsequent years, the network has provided start-up assistance to newly-formed StatCom programs at several universities. The Network's effort to enhance the visibility of StatCom through the ASA and at recent Joint Statistical Meetings has yielded dramatic results. At least 10 new StatCom programs have started since 2006, including multi-institution efforts with StatCom at Chicago and StatCom at Five Colleges. Network membership became international with the addition of StatCom at the University of Hasselt (Belgium). The network holds an annual business meeting at the JSM and publishes a semi-annual newsletter. The network website (<http://www.amstat.org/education/statcom/>) provides many resources for developing StatCom programs.

Each StatCom organization has its own unique organizational structure designed to balance student participation with the interest among community organizations. Purdue University founded StatCom in 2001 as a response to the University's call for greater participation in the local community. StatCom began helping local government and non-profit organizations in the Lafayette area understand their data. The Purdue University Department of Statistics has been principally supportive in all of the StatCom at Purdue endeavors. After receiving the ASA

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Member Initiatives Grant in 2006, StatCom at Purdue founded the StatCom Outreach sector of StatCom and reached out to other universities to help them found StatComs. Iowa State University has had particular success in the Ames area.

At Iowa State University, the StatCom student director works with the student executive committee to reach out to potential clients and to coordinate consulting project teams. The ISU executive committee will coordinate the StatCom Network for 2009-10. StatCom at Iowa State has worked with a number of organizations in the Ames community and has utilized the resources of Iowa State University Extension to advertise to communities across Iowa. Consulting teams have worked on a variety of projects, including assessment of the public library's strategic plan, projecting peak energy demand for the city of Ames, and making recommendations for post-election auditing in Iowa. Many StatCom efforts at Iowa State are bolstered by enthusiastic support and valuable input from faculty in the Department of Statistics.

A student-led effort has resulted in a lasting connection between the American Statistical Association and student pro bono consulting activities. The ASA Committee on Student Pro Bono Statistics began official work in 2009 and includes student members from seven universities with pro bono consulting experience. The committee organized an invited panel for the 2009 JSM and is developing topic contributed sessions for 2010. A committee priority is to play a coordinating role for and facilitate communication among independent student groups like StatCom that are engaged in pro bono statistics.

ASA Now Accepting Nominations for the W.J. Dixon Award for Excellence in Statistical Consulting

Janice Derr, U.S. Food and Drug Administration⁵

The ASA is pleased to announce that the W.J. Dixon Award for Excellence in Statistical Consulting is now available for nominations for 2010. The award, funded by a gift from his family, honors the memory of Will Dixon by recognizing outstanding contributions to statistical consulting. The award is given to a distinguished individual who has demonstrated excellence in statistical consulting, or developed and contributed new methods, software, or ways of thinking that improve statistical practice in general. In 2009, Doug Zahn received the first Dixon award for his contributions to advancing the science and art of statistical consulting.

If you would like to nominate a statistician for the 2010 Dixon award, please submit a nomination form, along with a letter of nomination and a recent CV of the nominee to the ASA office. The nomination form is available at the ASA web site:

<http://www.amstat.org/careers/wjdixonaward.cfm>.

Nominations are due by February 1, 2010 and should be sent by email to the ASA office at pamela@amstat.org or by mail to 732 N. Washington Street, Alexandria, VA 22314, with

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attention Award Nominations. If you have questions, please contact the committee chair, Janice Derr (phone: (301) 796-1204; email: Janice.Derr@fda.hhs.gov).

Statistics Resource Available for Purchase

John Bartko⁶

I am looking for a good home for my 9 volume (Volumes 1 to 8 are from A to Z and Volume 9 is a Supplement Volume) set of the First edition (first printed 1989 by Wiley) of the Encyclopedia of Statistical Sciences by Samuel Kotz & Norman L. Johnson, Editors-in-Chief and Campbell B. Read, Executive Editor. When first offered the cost was more than \$2,000, although I don't have the exact figures. I am asking \$500 for the set, plus shipping. If you are interested, please contact John Bartko (jjbartko@starpower.net), retired but consulting. I have been an ASA member for more than 40 years, which I offer as a sort of reference. I am happy to supply interested parties with references as well.

Comments from the Past Chair

Bruce Craig, Purdue University⁷

My term as Chair has come to an end. Looking back, I'm amazed at how quickly the year sped by. I want to thank everyone who put in time as an officer, organized and/or participated in one of our JSM sponsored sessions, or simply contacted an officer with an idea or two about section services. This section succeeds because of these efforts. I want to especially recognize those who are finishing their terms on the Executive Committee:

Brenda Gaydos, Eli Lilly and Company, chair elect / chair / past-chair
Susan McGorray, University of Florida, representative to the ASA Council of Sections
Karen Pieper, Duke University, at-large member of Executive Committee

Finally, I'd like to mention a couple initiatives that you should be hearing more about in the upcoming months. First, we plan a membership survey so the Section officers can better understand why a member joins the Section, stays with the Section, and what a member wants out of the Section. The second initiative is to again have about 4-5 phone conferences / webinars on various subjects through the year. If you have some ideas for a webinar, please contact an officer.

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Comments from the Chair

Todd Nick, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences⁸

It's hard to believe, but abstracts are due soon for the 2010 Vancouver Joint Statistical Meetings (JSM). The abstract submission form for the JSM was made available in December and the deadline is February 1st at 11:59 Eastern time. Please consider submitting an abstract to our section. The more presentations made in our section, the greater visibility we have. If you only have some ideas on a presentation at this point, please feel free to discuss them with our 2010 Program Chair, Walter Ambrosius (wambrosi@wfubmc.edu), or any of our officers.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to serve you as Chair this year. I would also like to thank all of the officers that serve our section and make it a success. I would especially like to recognize the efforts of Bruce Craig for the fabulous job he did this past year as chair. I welcome any ideas and/or suggestions for the Section and I look forward to seeing many of you at the JSM.

Notes from the Editor

Christopher Holloman, The Ohio State University⁹

Thanks as always to our contributors! As usual, Sarah (assistant editor) and I are looking for articles and ideas for future newsletters, so send ideas and comments to either of us.

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website address:**

www.amstat.org/sections/cnsl/

You'll find all information relating to the Section on Statistical Consulting, including our charter, officer list, section activities, past issues of *The Statistical Consultant*, minutes of past meetings, and more.