

Statisticians and the Media Explore Mutual Goals of Informing the Public at the Joint Statistical Meetings

ALEXANDRIA, VA (PRWEB) JULY 27, 2009 --- Statisticians and members of the media will discuss their mutual goals of increasing public understanding of statistics and a variety of scientific issues at the Joint Statistical Meetings (JSM). JSM, the largest annual gathering of statisticians in North America, will be held at the Washington (DC) Convention Center August 1—6.

“Statisticians and the media share an interest in providing the public with a better understanding of evidence that affects us all, including research on medicine, economy, education, and many other issues,” said Sally Morton, ASA president. “We are especially pleased that these sessions at JSM will help both parties discover how they can work together to improve the quality of the information provided to the public.”

The JSM sessions featuring statisticians and media representatives are described below. Information on all JSM sessions can be found via the online program, where you can search on keywords, date, type of program, presenter’s name or affiliation. Link to the online program:

<http://www.amstat.org/meetings/jsm/2009/onlineprogram/index.cfm?fuseaction=main>.

[Note: Members of the press can register to attend any of the conference sessions online at <http://www.amstat.org/meetings/jsm/2009/index.cfm?fuseaction=pressregistration>]

Spinning Heads and Spinning News: Statistics in the Media Monday, August 3, 10:30 am—12:20pm, Room CC-143A

Presenter: *Rebecca Goldin, Statistical Assessment Service/George Mason University (begins 11:15 am)*

Statistics are everywhere, from how many people lack health insurance to how to improve math education. Yet for being so prevalent, statistics are poorly understood by the general public. Using examples of news coverage, Goldin illustrates how the press can misuse and even abuse statistics.

It is important that media writers understand basic concepts from statistics, epidemiology and even toxicology. Goldin will show how powerful the work can be when the press goes beyond politics and morality to point out what science says, what it doesn't, and what it can't.

http://www.amstat.org/meetings/jsm/2009/onlineprogram/index.cfm?fuseaction=abstract_details&abstractid=304670

Statistics and the Media: Getting the Questions and Answers Right Tuesday, August 4, 8:30—10:20 am

Panelists: *Sharon Begley, Newsweek; Carl Bialek, Wall Street Journal; Tom Siegfried, Science News; Keith Winstein, Wall Street Journal*

Members of the media need to get to the truth behind the data in reports. Statisticians need to be able to provide answers that are responsive to the media's needs and help their audiences understand the findings of reports. This panel presentation and Q&A session, featuring members of the science media, will help ASA members determine how to respond to media questions and help the media understand how statisticians need the questions framed.

http://www.amstat.org/meetings/jsm/2009/onlineprogram/index.cfm?fuseaction=abstract_details&abstractid=303001

Communicating Statistical Concepts to a Lay Audience Tuesday, August 4, 10:30 am—12:20 pm, Room CC-202A

This session includes the following presentations; media presenters all are previous winners of ASA's Excellence in Statistical Reporting Award:

- Presentation and Interpretation of Statistical Results to Track Economic Developments — John Berry
- Statistical Issues in 'The New York Times' — Donald A. Berry, The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center; Gina Kolata, The New York Times
- The Prosecutor's Fallacy — Mark Buchanan, Independent Science Writer

http://www.amstat.org/meetings/jsm/2009/onlineprogram/index.cfm?fuseaction=activity_details&activityid=294&sessionid=204199

Mediating Statistics in the Media: Getting Your Numbers Rightly Reported

Tuesday, August 4, 2—3:20 pm, Room

Panelists: *David Leonhardt, The New York Times; Shankar Vedantam, The Washington Post; William Alpert, Barron's*

Statistics are used, and misused, every day in the media. This panel features three journalists who have been at the frontier of promoting the principled use of statistics in journalism. They'll suggest ways statisticians can get their work noticed and reported correctly. Alpert will contend that "Every Good Bayes Deserves Favorable Press," David Leonhardt will discuss the all too frequent lack of context ("It's Another Record High!"), and Shankar Vedantam will delineate his "Anecdotes and Data: Innumeracy in the Mass Media." Each will talk about the good, the bad, and the ugly in the media's use of statistics, and their ideas about raising statistical literacy in the general media.

http://www.amstat.org/meetings/jsm/2009/onlineprogram/index.cfm?fuseaction=activity_details&activityid=352&sessionid=204206

Teen Sex from Evidence to Policy: The Accuracy of the Media's Communication of Quantitative Methods **Wednesday, August 5, 8:30—10:20 am, Room CC-204B**

Presenter: *Janet E. Rosenbaum, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (begins 8:35 am)*

Health studies vary in appropriateness of their methodology to address a target policy question. The media may not report methodological issues accurately to the public, so studies with more appropriate statistical methods may not prevail in the policy arena. The session analyzes media reports obtained from Lexis-Nexis searches, coded for content, and evaluates how media accurately communicate methodological differences.

http://www.amstat.org/meetings/jsm/2009/onlineprogram/index.cfm?fuseaction=abstract_details&abstractid=303898

About JSM

JSM is held jointly with the American Statistical Association (ASA), the International Biometric Society (ENAR and WNAR), the Institute of Mathematical Statistics (IMS), and the Statistical Society of Canada. More than 5,000 statisticians from government, industry and academia are expected to attend the 2009 JSM, which features a range of activities, including more than 2,500 presentations, panels, roundtables, poster presentations, and continuing education courses. There also is an exhibit hall (with state-of-the-art statistical products and opportunities); a career placement service; and social and networking opportunities. Complete program and registration information for the 2009 JSM is available at the JSM web site at <http://www.amstat.org/meetings/jsm/2009/>.

About the American Statistical Association

The American Statistical Association (ASA), a scientific and educational society founded in Boston in 1839, is the second oldest continuously operating professional society in the United States. For 170 years, ASA has been providing its 18,000 members serving in academia, government, and industry and the public with up-to-date, useful information about statistics. The ASA has a proud tradition of service to statisticians, quantitative scientists, and users of statistics across a wealth of academic areas and applications. For additional information about the American Statistical Association, please visit the association's web site at <http://www.amstat.org> or call 703.684.1221.

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