

THE STATISTICAL CONSULTANT

Section on Statistical Consulting
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Christina M. Gullion, Editor

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Section on Statistical Consulting Mission and Membership

The Statistical Consultant is a member benefit for the ASA Section on Statistical Consulting. The special interests of the Section on Statistical Consulting are statistical consulting and the training of statistical consultants. The section is broadly interested in fostering the increased and improved use of statistics through effective client/consultant interchanges.

In addition to *The Statistical Consultant*, members can compete for one of up to three \$500 travel awards given annually for the best Topic Contributed Session proposed for

JSM, as well as participate in section business and officer elections. There's also free food and door prizes at the JSM Member Reception.

If you would like to join this Section, use the ASA Fax on Demand service to obtain an enrollment form. In the US, call (888) 267-8285; from outside the US, call (703) 531-0879. Request Form 1104 to join the Section. If you are not an ASA member, you need to join ASA in order to qualify for Section membership. To join ASA, request Form 1100.

Announcement of Travel Awards Competition for 2004

The Section on Statistical Consulting invites proposals for Topic (Special) Contributed Paper Sessions for the Joint Statistical Meetings to be held August 8-12, 2004, in Toronto, Canada.

Proposals submitted will compete for up to three travel awards. Each award consists of \$500 AND a registration fee waiver for the organizer. Each organizer will be responsible for lining up speakers for the session and for coordinating submission of abstracts in the fall of 2003.

A proposal should consist of a short (one-page) description of the session, including a description of the session theme, the types of papers or discussions to be included, and the intended audience. A list of possible speakers is helpful.

The proposal deadline is September 1, 2003. Send submissions to:

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Workshop on Statistical Consulting

The Seventh Purdue International Symposium on Statistics to be held June 19-24, 2003, at Purdue University will include a workshop entitled *Statistical Consultancy* on the last 2 days.

Participants will discuss topics of interest to those involved in statistical consulting including

- the structure of consulting organizations,
- funding,
- short courses,
- assistance with grant proposal writing,
- software consulting,
- preparation of graduate student consultants,

- accountability,
- reports,
- ethics,
- data monitoring boards,
- institutional review boards, and
- making the transition from consulting to collaboration.

The sessions will start on the morning of June 23 and will end at noon on June 24. Abstracts for a poster session to be held on the evening of June 23 are welcome.

See <http://www.stat.purdue.edu/symp7/> for details or contact George McCabe (mccabe@stat.purdue.edu) or Bruce Craig (bacraig@purdue.edu).

Statistics Consulting in an Academic Institution

John Zhang, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Editor's Note: John Zhang received a Travel Award from the ASA Section on Statistical Consulting for organizing this session at JSM 2002.

At the 2002 JSM meeting in New York City, the consulting section of the ASA organized a special topic contributed session, "Statistics Consulting in an Academic Institution".

On a sunny afternoon, as Jamaicans paraded up Fifth Avenue, a roomful of enthusiastic statisticians at the Hilton Hotel shared their personal experiences providing statistical consulting services at various academic institutions.

This session was about the operation of statistical consulting at an academic institution. Foci included

- the use of new technology in statistical consulting in an academic setting: the pluses and minuses;
- important elements for successful operation;
- potential impact of statistical consulting services on an academic career (promotion and tenure);
- the challenge of consulting on projects in a variety of disciplines: how to balance time and professionalism;
- the challenge of community and industrial projects;
- tips on how to get involved with community and industrial projects;
- tips on meeting the needs of community and industrial projects.

Speakers from four academic institutions gave talks in the session. Holmes Finch of the

University of South Carolina described case studies of two consulting interactions with distant clients. Christopher Williams of the University of Idaho also addressed the theme of using technology to strengthen consultation. Charles Bertness and I, both of Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), discussed our experiences running the Applied Research Lab at IUP.

K.B. Boomer (with Andrea Piccinin, Pennsylvania State University at College Park (PSU), who could not attend) gave an excellent presentation on the operations of the PSU Statistical Consulting Center. She talked about its mission, services, structure, history, as well as additional salient issues.

The highlight of the session was the talk given by Stacey Wicker and Dan Pontzer. At the time, they were graduate assistants at the Applied Research Lab at IUP. They shared their experiences and perspectives both as trainees and as statistical consultants. They presented insights on the demanding, yet rewarding, experiences of student statistical consultants.

For example, they discussed the many difficulties faced by the graduate student statistical consultant. These difficulties include

- an initial lack of confidence in statistical knowledge and abilities;
- unrealistic expectations from their clients; and
- knowing how to deal with clients who have minimal statistical knowledge, are over-dependent, and lack interest in understanding the related statistical concepts.

Stacey and Dan identified many qualities that a successful graduate student statistical

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consultant should possess: persistence; determination; resourcefulness; common sense; creativity; enthusiasm for learning; and effective communication skills. Also, they need to treat clients as customers.

They suggested that a statistical consulting organization in an academic setting should

- staff with graduate students from a variety of disciplines;
- offer continuous training and educational opportunities; and
- (most important) hire an energetic and student-oriented faculty member as director of the center.

The students presented insights that are frequently forgotten and overlooked by university faculty. It was refreshing to recall that one of the main goals of a university statistical consulting organization should be to educate our graduate students. We should never lose sight of that goal.

After the session, quite a few people commented to me about how nice it was to learn the operations of different universities' statistics consulting organizations, and how nice it was to hear about our graduate students' concerns, expectations, and triumphs through their experiences in these agencies.

Comments from the Chair

Matilde Sanchez, Merck Research Labs

This is my first column as chair of the Statistical Consulting Section. It is a pleasure to serve the Section with so many supportive and contributing members. I would like to give a preview of some of the planned section activities for 2003.

A major project for 2003 is the publication of the brochure "When you consult a statistician . . . What to expect". The purpose of this publication is to facilitate the interaction between a statistical consultant and a client and to provide a potential client or employer of a statistical consultant with an overview of what is involved in working with a statistician.

The brochure discusses such issues as when it is useful to consult a statistician, the responsibilities of statistician and client, and what to expect as you initiate and continue a working relationship with a statistician, including a brief summary of the ethics that should guide a statistician's behavior.

To help with the publication and distribution costs, the section has submitted a proposal to request funding from the ASA Strategic Initiative funds for 2003.

We hope to see you at the Joint Statistical Meetings in San Francisco this August. As in previous years, the business meeting at the JSM will be the section's idea-generating session.

Even if you can't attend the JSM, the section needs to hear from you. Your input and suggestions for what the section can do for our membership are always welcome.

We also need volunteers to help with the section's activities. Contact Shirlene Pearson (pearson@mail.smu.edu), our Program Chair for 2004, with any ideas or proposals, as the invited sessions for 2004 will be close to finalized by the time we meet at the 2003 JSM in San Francisco.

Remember that members can compete for

one of up to three travel awards given annually for the Best Topic Contributed Session proposed for JSM.

Please check www.amstat.org/sections/

for more information on our Section.

Along with the other officers of the Statistical Consulting Section, I hope we can make this an eventful year for the Section.

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Notes from the Editor

We were unable to put out a winter issue because no articles or announcements were submitted.

I changed jobs about a year ago and am now in a much more demanding position, including tenure review, so my ability and motivation to chase "volunteers" to write articles for the Statistical Consultant have dropped to near zero. I will work on one additional issue, which will provide the JSM program and related meeting activities for this August, and then the position of editor for this newsletter will become open.

Karla Hommertzhaim Genter has ably assisted me in doing the L^AT_EX markup for this issue, for which I am extremely grateful. She

has indicated her willingness to continue this association with the next editor, if her assistance is wanted.

I invite you to volunteer a short article for the next issue (deadline June 1). Topics of interest to others in the Section that have come to my attention recently include:

- errors and omissions insurance for statistical consultants;
- handling financial disputes with clients;
- the role of the statistical consultant in writing funding proposals (e.g., NIH R01); and
- the impact of HIPAA on statistical practice.

If you have ideas or knowledge about these or other topics that you would like to share with your colleagues, please feel free to write

them up in 1000 to 2000 words and submit to me at the address below.

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