

Section U (Statistics) Minutes
February 17, 2007
Hilton Union Square, San Francisco

Present: Jana Asher, Mark Becker, Ron Brookmeyer, Michael P. Cohen, Bill Cumberland, William Eddy, Bob Fay, José Fernandez, Mary Foulkes, John Gardinier, Turkian Gardinier, Don Guthrie, Erich Lehmann, Cynthia Robinson, Julie Shaffer, Al Tupek, Jessica Utts, Stan Young

The meeting opened at 10:00 am with introductions all around.

Cynthia R. Robinson (Director, AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellowships introduced the [Science and Technology Fellowships Programs](#). This AAAS program brings scientists and engineers to Washington to work with Congress or with Federal Agencies. The program intends to develop policy-savvy scientists. Many agencies and Congressional staffs want more statisticians, so the program is attempting to recruit statisticians. The program is not designed as a post-doc program, but as an opportunity for PhD scientists (the age range of the Fellows in the program this year is 28-66). Additional information is available on the website (fellowships.aaas.org), and the deadline for applications is December 20th. Individual applicants have to be US citizens. Many of the Federal agencies provide options to stay a second year. There are Congressional, Diplomacy, Energy, Health, Nat'l Defense and Global Security Fellows. Congressional Fellowships funded out of AAAS or about 30 Professional Societies, and some are funded by Executive Branch Agencies. ASA is not one of the professional societies funding a Fellow. About 1/3 of the fellows develop Federal careers and stay on as Federal employees, about 1/3 return to their original institutions, and 1/3 launch new careers in new directions. There is not an expectation from the Fellows program that Fellows will get hired at Agencies they serve. Mark Becker suggested advertising within AmStat News, and Michael Cohen mentioned the ASA committee of Reps to AAAS has a column in AmStat News that could further advertise the Fellows program. Cynthia said that the program was very strong in biological and physical sciences, not enough in social sciences. She stressed that the focus is on policy, a learning experience, and to contribute to society. The Fellows program is organized to start in September, ends the following August, includes a two week boot camp, monthly seminars, listservs, etc. The Fellows become part of larger, active network of AAAS Fellows. Fellows are hired at GS 12/1 (Federal Civil Service) level, but with more experience up to GS 12/10. Ron Brookmeyer asked about midcareer people deciding on a career change, and then looking to get more into the policy arena. They are often with advanced degrees. This program sounds like a good stepping stone into policy for them. The diversity of career stages is beneficial to the Fellows program.

Jessica Utts summarized the [AAAS Policy on Resolutions](#). Resolutions are submitted to the Committee on Council Affairs which consider each resolution and decides whether or not to bring those forward to the full Council. There is an open meeting of Committee on Council Affairs at the AAAS annual meeting and people can explain their resolution, but cannot bring up new resolutions. This year two resolutions considered and both rejected. In one resolution, AAAS was asked to endorse the "rainbow darter" as the national fish. Committee didn't think it was appropriate for the AAAS to take a stand. The second resolution, on global warming caused by jet aircraft, was also rejected. One thing is going forward, a request from the [Fulbright Academy of Science and Technology \(FAST\)](#) to become an affiliate organization. The FAST is still new, with 195 members, and members have to be former Fulbright Scholars. The approach was to keep in touch with FAST, but not accept as AAAS affiliate yet. They support the advancement of knowledge by linking researchers around the world. More than a social network, FAST addresses global issues, etc. The rules for affiliates are that they have at least 200 members, and exist for at least 5 years. The AAAS Council meeting is open to all and includes discussion of Federal budgets, etc.

Mike Cohen reported on the [Education Section \(Q\) meeting](#). Felice Levine (American Educational Research Association) gave a talk at the beginning of the section meeting, about good research practices, and causal inference. Section Q tends to get lots of proposals that are education initiatives, and they would like to increase the education proposals. Bob Fay had a good symposium on the Role of Science in Improving and Sustaining Education at this meeting, with Marcia Linn as a speaker.

Mike Cohen (Chair of the [ASA Committee of AAAS Representatives](#)) submitted a Strategic Initiative to ASA Board to support non-statistical speakers to ASA meeting, and more non-ASA committee members to AAAS meeting. Mike did not yet have a decision and was still waiting on that initiative to be considered by the ASA Board.

For the [AAAS 2008 meeting in Boston](#), the theme is *Science and Technology from a Global Perspective*, deadline for symposia proposals is May 2. John Gardinier summarized the proposal from Nancy Gordon on "Helping the Public Understand when Scientific Information is Valid". The focus will be on distinguishing valid from pseudo science. The

proposed speakers are Anne Suchat, Carl Bialik, and Sherwood Boehlert. All speakers have been contacted, and are tentatively agreed. Suggestions were forthcoming for revising the wording of the proposal to make it more in line with the Annual meeting theme. The more sections that endorse the better the acceptance of any proposed symposium. Want an audience, Section involvement, interest broadly, lends credibility, a sponsoring section has a loosely defined responsibility to provide funding. Section K asked for one change, to discuss the issue of communicating ambiguity (or uncertainty).

Al Tupek reported on the [Social, Economic, and Political Sciences Section \(K\)](#). Ken Prewitt was the past-chair of the section, and he will be proposed as a plenary lecturer. His topic has to do with Federal databases (e.g., the Decennial Census) used by social and behavioral sciences. These databases are infrastructure for the social, behavioral and economic sciences. Bill Eddy mentioned Ken's point that economics wouldn't exist without these surveys. Secondly, the world is changing, and we rely on sample surveys, but response rates have been falling. Industry has turned to administrative records. Ken is interested in sustaining existing surveys, and to get people to think more carefully about integrating administrative records into surveys. These records have a lot of the same problems that surveys have. The Statistics Section agreed to support both the Plenary speaker proposal and the symposia proposal from Nancy Gordon.

Stan Young asked about the response rate, the current population survey response rate is about 90%, but follow-up is very expensive. Ron Brookmeyer mentioned the estimation of Iraq deaths. Ron was interested in situations of difficulty in measurements in a disaster arena. According to Bill Eddy, Bill Kalsbeeck suggested that something might be done at the ASA meeting in the summer. The Washington Statistical Society also had session on this topic too. Ron's focus was on surveys in disaster situations, Tsunami, Katrina, etc. These issues have sense of chaos, and trying to do field work, absence of infrastructure. AAAS has an office of Science and Human Rights addressing this issue, and has been working with the ASA Committee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights. David Banks and Fritz Sheuren have been actively involved. Jana Asher (AAAS Science and Human Rights Program) also expressed an interest in this topic. Ron will work with Jana on a potential symposium.

Numerous other potential topics were discussed: the US production of scientists and engineers; data security in the global economy; randomness as a cause; algorithms applied to large databases to predict purchases (as used by WalMart, Netflix, Google).

Bill Eddy (incoming [Chair-Elect of Section U](#)) suggested Census-related topics for the 2009 AAAS annual meeting in Chicago.

The three [Hot Topics](#) taken forward from the Section to the Program Planning meeting were Surveys in disaster situations, national survey databases as scientific infrastructure, and helping the public understand when scientific information is valid.

Mark Becker introduced the two new Fellows in attendance, William Cumberland and Stan Young, and mentioned that [this year the Section had nine new Fellows](#). The process for nomination of Fellows was discussed, and copies of the Three Fellows Nomination form distributed.

There was a brief discussion of Section budget. Since the AAAS has changed its budgeting processes, each Section needs to address what to do with any funds that cannot carry over into the next year. Joan Hilton mentioned that the variable allotment is a function of our primary section identification, and that currently only 20% of Section U members list Statistics as their primary section. Mary Foulkes suggested that funds remaining at the end of the year could be donated to the Fred Mosteller memorial fund at Harvard, to honor the only AAAS President from the Statistics Section. Another suggestion was to donate to the AAAS Science and Human Rights program. Jana Asher described the Science and Human Rights program, which analyzes data on human rights issues related to genocides and other mass atrocities. There have been joint series with Washington Statistical Society, and Lancet publication on Iraqi deaths estimates. Fritz Sheuren and David Banks are working with ASA on a rapid response team when external groups need them. AAAS pays for about 60% of minimal core funding for its Science and Human Rights program, the rest comes from grants and external resources.

Mark Becker mentioned [judging the AAAS student poster sessions](#). Judging is not too difficult or time-consuming. The Medicine and Public Health poster sections have no problems getting judges but other topics [e.g. Physical Sciences, Social Sciences] do need volunteers. He encourages volunteerism.

Ron Brookmeyer expressed [thanks to Mary Foulkes for her service to the Section as Secretary](#). He also expressed thanks to Joan Hilton for taking on this position.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:45 PM.

Mary Foulkes, Secretary