Fall 2024 Newsletter

Social Statistics Section

ASA

Letter from the Chair

Dylan Small (2024 Chair)

Dear SSS members:
We had a good crowd and fun time at our Business Meeting and Mixer at JSM 2024 in Portland. We heard a stimulating talk from our inaugural Social Statistics Section Distinguished Scholar Award for Lifetime Contributions recipient, David Banks, on the "Future of Social Statistics."

This award for lifetime contributions will be given biennially and in the other years, a midcareer award will be given. Look for a call for nominations for the midcareer award in early 2025.

Our section has a set up a committee to support ASA fellow nominations. It will be chaired by the Past Chair which will be me for 2025. If you know of any section members deserving of nomination for ASA fellow, especially those who may have been overlooked, please contact me at dsmall@wharton.upenn.edu.

Dylan Small, SSS Chair (2024)

Upcoming Deadlines and Events

2025 Joint Statistical Meetings Deadlines (Nashville, Tennessee):

December 9: Topic-contributed session proposals due
February 3: Abstract submission deadline
May 1: Registration and housing open
May 31: Draft manuscript deadline
June 3: Early registration deadline
June 25: Housing deadline
August 2 – August 7: 2025 Joint Statistical Meetings

- Winners of the GSS/SRMS/SSS Paper Competition will be notified by January 15, 2025.

- Wray Jackson Smith Scholarship: May 2025

From the Program Chair and Program Chair-Elect

Monika Hu (2024 Program Chair)

Maria Cuellar (2024 Program Chair Elect)

Reflection on JSM 2024:

SSS had 4 invited sessions, 6 topic-contributed sessions, and 3 contributed sessions at JSM 2024. The sessions had a wide range of topics, including intersection of statistics and social sciences, statistical analysis of police use of force, machine learning and classification methods for complex surveys, statistical data privacy, causal inference, population size estimation, and applications in justice, economics, education, and health. SSS was also proud to support five student paper winners, jointly with the Survey Research Methods Section and Government Statistics Section, and awarded David Banks the inaugural Distinguished Scholar Award.
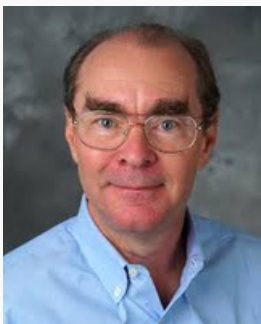
Looking to JSM 2025:

The program committee has selected three sessions for the JSM 2025 theme, "Statistics, data science, and AI enriching society", to be sponsored by the Social Statistics Section. Their titles are: "Creating Something from Nothing? Synthetic Data Analysis for Social Good and Policy Making", "Revolutionizing Propensity Score Estimation with Machine Learning Techniques", and "When Many Models Are Equally Accurate: Exploring Interpretability and Uncertainty Quantification."

David Banks awarded Distinguished Scholar Award

David Banks

David Banks is the inaugural winner of the Social Statistics Section Distinguished Scholar award. He gave remarks on "The Future of Social Statistics" at the 2024 Joint Statistical Meetings in the SSS Business Meeting/Mixer.

Social Statistics Section Social Media

The Social Statistics Section is on social media!

Follow us on X/Twitter (@amstat_sss).

If you have material you would like us to share, send us a message!

SSS Member Highlight:
Elizabeth Stuart
Hurley-Dorrier Professor and Chair, Department of Biostatistics
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

In the Spring 2024 newsletter, the SSS began highlighting members in newsletters. Our second highlighted member is Professor Elizabeth Stuart. We hope you will enjoy reading about her background, activities, and vision for the future of social statistics.

Can you describe your current role?

I am Professor and Chair in the Department of Biostatistics at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, with joint appointments in Mental Health (where I had my primary appointment for 15 years) and Health Policy and Management. The role is approximately 40% research, 40% admin, and 20% teaching. I really like each of those pieces and am happy I can do each of them within one position, and I love that day to day I have a lot of autonomy about what I work on, and with fantastic collaborators. My research is a combination of my own methodological projects (funded by grants) as well as collaborative projects with colleagues in public health and medicine (mostly), and many collaborations with colleagues outside Hopkins as well. Each day brings something different! [As I wrote that I interpreted role as just my primary work role, but in reality I also have a bunch of other roles, both professionally (e.g., serving on various national committees) and personally (e.g., mom of 2 teenagers, school committees, spouse, etc.)!]

Can you share one or two experiences that impacted your career direction?

During college and graduate school, as well as while I was at Mathematica Policy Research before and after my PhD, I mostly wanted to use statistics for the social sciences and public policy. I never would have expected to be a Professor of Mental Health or Biostatistics in a School of Public Health, given that I had no formal training in those areas! But actually I got to mental health through education and the social sciences -- many faculty in the Department of Mental Health were doing school based studies (e.g., randomized trials of programs to reduce aggressive behavior in kids) and so they were excited about my knowledge and expertise in those areas. And the beauty of statistics is that the methods can apply across a range of areas! So I've been in public health for 18 years and have loved it.

The other "experience" I want to share is the value of mentors -- formal, informal, and peer. Especially when going outside my own comfort zone (e.g., writing my first first-authored substantive paper) it was incredibly helpful to have mentors and collaborators and friends who believed in me and pushed me to try new things. I encourage everyone to try to find those people, and to look for ways to be that support network for others!

What professional meetings / conferences do you regularly attend?

Probably too many, although one benefit of living in DC is that often conferences are fairly local. I go to JSM, ENAR, and the Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness (SREE) almost every year, the International Conference on Health Policy Statistics (ICHPS) every time (every 2 years), and then others every few years -- e.g., the Society for Epidemiologic Research (SER), the American Causal Inference Conference (ACIC), etc. I am also on two National Academies standing committees currently, and each of those has a couple of meetings per year, and then of course there are various other meetings and events that pop up -- seminars, workshops on topics of interest to me, etc. It's a lot of travel, and it has gone up and down over the years -- e.g., with a high school senior next year I'm committing to less time away!

SSS Member Highlight:
Elizabeth Stuart
Hurley-Dorrier Professor and Chair, Department of Biostatistics
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

What area of social statistics do you believe warrants more study?

One thing I have literally wanted to work on since before graduate school (it was the topic of my NSF Graduate Research Fellowship application!) is uncertainty assessment in systems models. There is more and more interest in models like that -- e.g., agent-based models, systems dynamics models, microsimulations, etc., which combine information from multiple studies or data sources, and have various assumptions built in. From my knowledge there has been little work on methods for uncertainty quantification in those models, both in terms of statistical uncertainty and also uncertainty even about the structure of the models, or how data and estimates get combined from multiple sources. It's a big topic but I think quite important especially given increasing interests in combining data sources and complex models like that.

I probably should say something about AI, too -- it's hard to avoid these days! I'm particularly interested in thinking about how statisticians can help contribute to learning about how to bring in aspects of data quality or representativeness to AI models, as well as how study design considerations (e.g., causal inference) can be used to help evaluate AI tools in practice. Statisticians have a lot to offer in thinking about the whole pipeline of AI, from data inputs to the models themselves to how they are used in the real world.

Social Statistics Section Executive Committee

Dylan Small: Chair
Stephanie Eckman: Past-Chair
Elizabeth Tipton: Chair-Elect
Tyler McCormick: Secretary / Treasurer
Maria Cuellar: Program Chair-Elect
Claire Kelling: Publications Officer
Sharon Stern: Council of Sections Representative
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Please find more information about SSS here.

JSM 2024 Highlights