

THE WASHINGTON STATISTICAL SOCIETY

NEWS-LETTER FOR JANUARY 1946

Postponed Meeting To Be Held January 16, 1946

The meeting on "Some New Federal Statistical Plans and Programs" which was scheduled for December 19, but which was postponed because of the weather, will be held January 16, 1946 at 8 p.m. in room 101 Hall of Government, 21st and G Streets, N.W.

Joint Meeting February 15, 1946

A joint meeting of the Washington Statistical Society and the Washington Chapter of the Institute of Mathematical Statistics will be held Friday February 15, 1946 at 8:15 p.m. in room 101 Hall of Government, 21st and G Streets, N.W. The program will be devoted entirely to the sampling problems of the Bureau of Internal Revenue. The chairman and speakers, all from the Bureau of Internal Revenue, are as follows:

Chairman: T.C. Atkeson, Assistant to the Commissioner

The Sample of Individual Income Tax Returns Lillian Robbins, Statistical Division

The Sample of Small Corporation Returns A.C. Rosander, Statistical Division

Discussion

Results To Date Of Membership Poll

To date we have received 40 responses to the questionnaire contained in the December issue of the NEWS-LETTER. This is only about a 10 percent return from our membership. It is hoped that the holiday season has delayed a number of members from responding and that their replies will soon be forthcoming. A preliminary analysis of these 40 answers reveals that the following fields have been mentioned by 5 or more persons: Sampling, 13; statistics in management, 11; opinion polls, 7; the design of experiments, 7; employment and related problems, 6; quality control, 5. These returns are being put in the hands of the Program Committee for whatever action it wishes to take. It is likely that some definite plans will be formulated within another month.

Wanted: More Discussion Of The Professional Problems of Statisticians

In the November 1945 issue of the Bulletin of the ASA, there is an explanation of how the Committee on Fellows proceeded in order to select the fellows for 1945. In a forward, Mr. Kellogg, national secretary, states that the explanation is presented for the review and comment of the members of the Association.

In reading this explanation the writer found no answer to the basic question as to why the Association has fellows at all. The discussion seemed to be about how the selection is being made, not why. If the purpose of the Committee on Fellows is to afford a means of recognizing outstanding service in the fields of statistical theory and practice, then might it not be a good idea to consider substituting the giving of annual awards for distinguished service along the lines followed by a number of scientific and engineering societies? Under such a procedure the ASA could give an annual award, if there was deemed to be any worthy recipient, in each of five fields: statistical theory; professional training of statisticians; application of statistical principles and techniques to academic research, to problems of business, and to problems of government.

Any consideration of the problem of special recognition must go back, either implicitly or explicitly, to the basic problems of what constitutes statistical theory and practice, what are the unique functions of a professional statistician, and what is creative work or distinguished service in this field. According to the report of the Committee on Fellows, writing something seems to be a rather common characteristic of fellows, while being a chapter officer is one of the less common characteristics. This raises the question as to whether the present standards of selection are not overly academic.

While committees are appointed from time to time to study these basic questions, as yet little seems to have emerged in the way of useful formulations. Some progress has been made in defining the functions of a statistician; a job description has been prepared for the National Roster, a copy of which was reprinted in a recent issue of the Bulletin of the ASA. This description, however, could be improved upon in a number of places, and it is hoped that some of these at least will be incorporated in the next edition.

In this connection it is suggested that the Society sponsor within the next few months a conference on the professional problems of statisticians, a conference at which would be represented the Civil Service Commission, the statistical departments of the local universities, and all of the major statistical agencies of the Federal government.

Statistical Items

During December 1945 Remington Rand announced the opening of a Machine Tabulation Institute in Washington, D.C. According to their statement this Institute will be devoted largely to helping Federal agencies which have this type of installation. A service agency which will handle small tabulation jobs at cost, is also a part of the Institute.

The opinion polls recently started by The Washington Post are based upon sampling areas of Washington, D.C. selected on the basis of techniques worked out by the Bureau of the Census.