Expanding Leadership and Substantive Skills within The Federal Statistical System

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Development of the Field

• Survey statistics and methodology really just emerged as a separate discipline in the last few decades

• First major sample survey programs created in the late 1930s
  • Monthly Report on the Labor Force (became the CPS) started in 1940
  • National Health Interview Survey in 1957

• Journals for the field also relatively new
  • Survey Methodology started in 1975
  • JOS started in 1985
  • Survey Methods Research in 2006
  • JSSAM just in last two years
Educational Infrastructure

• Educational infrastructure is also recent
• JSPM founded in 1993, with faculty from University of Maryland, University of Michigan, Westat
• Sponsored by the ICSP (15 agencies, chaired by Chief Statistician from OMB)
• Created to offer graduate training in survey methodology
  – To upgrade skills of current employees of the Federal statistical system
  – To add to pool of talent, recruit new members
JPSM Educational Programs

• Graduate programs (MS, PhD)—200 + MS grads (60% Social Science, 40% Statistical Science), ~ 20 PhD graduates

• Short courses on specific topics—600 to 700 attendees per year

• Most graduate classes open to non-degree-seeking students

• Junior Fellow program: summer internship program for college students; 32 per year

• Template for Michigan and UNL programs
Distribution of JPSM Graduates over Time
Other Programs

• Michigan Program in Survey Methodology
  – First graduates in 2004
  – At total of 46 MS grads, 8 Ph.D.’s as of 2010
  – Across the two programs, 18 Master’s grads and 4 Ph.D.’s per year

• UNL Program also producing Master’s and Ph.D.’s—87 Master’s, 4
Other Resources

• UNC, GW, York College/CUNY, University of Cincinnati, OSU have Certificate Programs
• Southampton and Essex in UK
• Barcelona in Catalonia
• Waterloo in Canada
The Result?

• Most survey organizations populated by people with little or no formal training in survey methods.

• Often these people who are very specialized—work on one aspect of one study (e.g., interviewer training, cognitive testing, weighting).

• “Stovepiping” may lead to further insularity; particularly a problem in organizations with long-standing, large projects.
A Related Issue

• The multiple cultures issue; different specialty groups within any statistical/survey organization:
  
  • Substantive experts (criminologists at BJS; economists at Federal Reserve, BLS; health researchers at NCHS)
  
  • Statisticians/methodologists
  
  • Computer programmers
  
  • Managers
  
• Tend to different priorities and different values
The Result?

• People often seem to think that there is no science involved in surveys

• Experience and common sense trump survey methodology; generally, leaders of the organization are substantive experts or managers not survey researchers

• Thus, a key skill for technical people is the ability to communicate clearly (and tactfully) what they know

• Particularly a problem in our field since many people with the strongest technical skills are not native English speakers
One Final Thought

• A peculiar feature of the American educational system is that people are not trained to do their jobs

• E.g., law school doesn’t prepare people to practice law

• Graduate schools don’t teach people to teach; it teaches them to do research

• Absence of management training often evident in survey organizations; senior people may have little or no exposure to such training (and may denigrate importance of management skills)