

Service-Oriented Statistics: *What Can Students Do?*

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In the February 2006 issue of *Amstat News*, we described Statistics in the Community (STATCOM), a student-driven volunteer consulting service at Purdue University. STATCOM has been providing statistical consulting free of charge to local governments and nonprofit community organizations in Indiana since 2001. In February, we invited individuals and groups interested in service-oriented consulting to contact and work with us as they develop similar programs at other colleges and universities.

Given the strong response to our article, STATCOM began exploring ways to reach more students and student groups and to develop materials to help others engage in service-oriented consulting. In March, with sponsorship from the Section on Statistical Consulting, the Section on Statistical Education, and the Central Indiana Chapter, we were awarded a strategic initiatives grant from the ASA to pursue these outreach efforts more actively.

A Role for Students in Service-Oriented Statistics

Service-oriented statistical consulting is a natural way for statisticians to help meet societal needs. In the process, statisticians and statistics as a discipline benefit in numerous ways. The consulting projects increase awareness among the general public of statistics and the potential that statisticians have to make positive contributions. Meanwhile, nonprofits, local governments, schools, and other community organizations see firsthand the benefits of good statistical methods. Community consulting also increases the visibility of the ASA and its activities broadly within local communities, and we anticipate current and new ASA members will be attracted by the opportunity to engage in statistics as a community service.

Students, in particular, stand to benefit



from service-oriented statistical consulting as they gain practical experience, acquire skills useful in any future career, interact with professionals in the field, and develop a sense of volunteerism even before they become practicing statisticians. For colleges and universities, consulting

is a natural form of community outreach and engagement. By involving students in community-oriented consulting, colleges and universities introduce a service learning component to their curricula.

The STATCOM Strategic Initiative

The goal of the STATCOM Strategic Initiative (SI) is to promote the development of student-driven community consulting programs. One major objective is to develop and share materials that help students and others get involved in service-oriented consulting. These materials will be targeted to newcomers, addressing common questions and describing general methods groups could use as they begin work in different types of communities. The package will be available on CD through STATCOM and on the ASA's web site.

STATCOM members also will be available as a resource for those starting community consulting programs. Support for travel through the STATCOM SI allows us to visit new programs at other colleges and universities as we develop partnerships with them. Ultimately, our goal is to establish a formal network among community service-oriented programs.

Travel to other institutions also will allow us to promote the concept of service-oriented statistics to a wide audience. ASA Chapters could play an important role in

this, as they could serve as focal points for interested local groups and provide additional support for student groups. Service-oriented consulting activities through the Chapters themselves would increase public awareness of ASA Chapters and would get members, and students in particular, involved in ASA and Chapter-specific activities, some even before they complete their education. These students would then be more likely to continue their involvement after graduation.

Calling All Students

Anyone interested in learning more about STATCOM and its activities should visit www.stat.purdue.edu/external_relations/statcom and email us at statcom-outreach@stat.purdue.edu. We already have started interacting with students and student groups at other colleges and universities, and we look forward to developing these and other partnerships in the coming months. Knowing the interests, questions, and needs of groups as they become involved in service-oriented consulting will be important to us as we develop resources that others could use. We also hope that developing a network of STATCOM-type programs will provide an additional resource to new service-oriented organizations.

The Joint Statistical Meetings in Seattle this year offers an ideal opportunity to share information, ideas, and experiences. STATCOM will chair an open meeting on Monday, August 7, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Washington State Convention & Trade Center, Rooms 307 and 308. Please check the online program to verify the room numbers. The meeting is titled, "Service-Oriented Consulting: What Can Students Do in the Community?" At this meeting, we will discuss our activities, how others can get involved in their communities, and details of past projects. We also will demonstrate the materials we are developing on service-oriented consulting. We hope all who are interested will come to hear about our experiences, share their own, and explore the possibilities of working together! n