WSS

The Washington Statistical Society

SINCE 1926

IN THIS ISSUE

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A Message from WSS' President

To the Washington, DC Statistics and Data Science Community,

It is a great honor to serve as the 2025–2026 president of the Washington Statistical Society (WSS). I'm humbled to follow in the footsteps of my predecessors who have led this society with vision and dedication, and I look forward to working with all of you to carry that legacy forward.

This coming year marks the momentous 100th anniversary of WSS. Since 1926, our society has been contributing to advancement in statistical thinking, community-building, and public service excellence. This anniversary is not only a time for celebration, but also an opportunity to reflect on our history, our mission, and our future.

This year also brings significant challenges, as many of our members face career uncertainties, navigate transitions, and adjust to evolving professional priorities. As a society, we remain committed to supporting our community by staying responsive, fostering open dialogue, and encouraging mutual support.

Our role as a regional society remains crucial. The Washington area continues to be a center for federal statistics, scientific research, and data-informed public service. The work our members do, such as upholding the quality of data, advancing rigorous analysis, and supporting sound decision-making, has far-reaching relevance and significance both across the industry and the nation.

As we celebrate 100 years of WSS, we also look ahead. We reaffirm our core values, honor the contributions of long-standing members, welcome new voices, uplift our community, and champion the vital role of statistics across all aspects of civic life. We embrace the promise and complexities of emerging AI, recognizing its growing impact on our fields.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to serve this remarkable community. I look forward to hearing your ideas, supporting your efforts, and helping WSS navigate into its new era — Within WSS, we all become stronger, more connected, and impactful as always.

Warm regards,
Benmei Liu
WSS President, 2025–2026

WSS ANNUAL REPORT

A Century of Washington Statistics

The state of the Washington Statistical Society reflects the state of Washington statistics. Rapid changes in technology have deepened inequality, resulting in economic insecurity, anxiety, and resentment. In response, a populist movement is questioning the legitimacy of science as an independent and professional enterprise. The profession of statistics—the discipline concerned with the mathematical principles of scientific inquiry—finds itself in the crosshairs.

It is under these conditions that we work to advance our mission of fostering statistical thinking and promoting unity among those concerned with statistical matters in the Washington metropolitan area.

It was also under these conditions that the Washington Statistical Society was born a century ago. The Progressive Era had largely ended, marked by the First Red Scare and new restrictions on speech. The anti-science movement reached a national flashpoint with the Scopes "Monkey" Trial just months before the society was established on January 19th, 1926.

Since then, the state of the society has waxed and waned with the state of Washington statistics. After the New Deal, the society claimed nearly 1,000 members, representing a third of all members of the American Statistical Association. Following the Great Society three decades later, perhaps the peak of public trust in science, society membership grew to nearly 2,000 members, about an eighth of all members of the American Statistical Association.

Table 1: Approximate Number of Members in the Washington Statistical Society (WSS) and American Statistical Association (ASA)

Year	WSS Membership	ASA Membership	WSS as % of ASA
2025	730	14,600	5%
2024	760	16,000	5%
2023	720	15,800	5%
1995	1,200	19,000	6%
1988	1,500	15,000	10%
1979	1,773	14,000	13%
1967	1,500	10,000	15%
1942	1,000	3,000	33%

Sources: Allen (1988), Mason and McKenzie (2015)

Since its peak, however, membership has dropped back to New Deal era levels. This decline is not due to a commensurate drop in local statisticians. Membership today is about two-thirds of what it was in the late 90s, but the number of statisticians in the Washington metropolitan area is largely unchanged. The same is true for the number of statisticians in the federal government (as of March 2025).

If anything, the local statistics community has increased precipitously in recent years with the explosion of data science, a profession essentially equivalent to statistics (see Auerbach et al. 2024). When data science is included, society membership constitutes roughly six percent of Washington area statisticians today, down from a third in the late 90s. See Table 2.

Table 2 Approximate Number of Statisticians in the Washington, DC-Maryland-Virginia (DMV) Metropolitan Statistical Area and Federal Government

Year	Washington (DMV) Area		Federal Government		
	Statisticians	Data Scientists	Mathematical Statisticians	Statisticians/ Stat Assistants	Data Scientists
2025	-	-	1,650	4,390	1,370
2024	3,490	8,530	1,660	4,440	1,130
2023	3,850	6,840	1,620	4,310	540
1998	3,410	0	1,240	4,410	0

Sources: BLS OEWS (https://www.bls.gov/oes/) Occupation Codes 15-2041, 15-2051, 25312 and OPM FedScope (https://www.fedscope.opm.gov/) Occupation Codes 1529, 1530, 1531, and 1560. OEWS data is for the DC-VA-MD-WV MSA/PMSA. FedScope data is as of September except for 2025, which is as of March and preliminary.

Several factors explain the decline. Chief among them is the advent of the internet. Professional communities are no longer bound by geography, and the role the Washington Statistical Society once played in disseminating statistical knowledge to the local community is no longer necessary.

This shift is reflected in society activities. During the 90s, the society helped organize more than 50 seminars and 5 short courses each year. A short course brought as many as 200 participants. Today, as in the early days of the society, seminars are held once or twice a month at most. While a seminar can attract more than 200 participants, attendance is remote or unpredictable. In addition, several short courses have been canceled since the pandemic due to lack of interest, leaving one to ask whether a regional association such as the Washington Statistical Society is obsolete.

I would argue the answer is no. While the role of the Washington Statistical Society has changed, its regional mission is in fact more relevant than ever before. That is because the concerns of Washington area statisticians—such as the quality of federal statistics and public information, the use of data as evidence for policymaking, and the promotion of statistics as necessary civics education—are of unprecedented national importance, shaping the

infrastructure on which our modern data-dependent society is being built. These concerns are not limited to the Washington area, but our association with Washington, the seat of power in the US, provides the ultimate vantage point from which we can work together to advance them.

Our relevance is evident from recent programming, which have included subjects such as measuring income inequality (Connie Citro, 2024 Hansen Lecture), small area estimation and data integration (Partha Lahiri, 2025 Hansen Lecture, forthcoming), polling and poststratification (Andrew Gelman, 2024 seminar on special election with GMU and 2025 JPSM Distinguished Lecture), political polarization and networks (Alex Volfovsky, 2024 Cox Award), and data linkage (John Eltinge, Amy O'Hara, and Martin Slawski, WSS President's Invited Session at STATS Day) to name just a few.

But if we only reach 6% of those engaged in statistical work in the Washington metropolitan area, we are falling short of our mission of unity.

Our challenge is to demonstrate that statistical thinking is not optional in the age of artificial intelligence. Automation accelerates decision making, but no algorithm can choose judiciously among the competing statistical principles that underlie design, measurement, and inference— just as no algorithm can or should decide where free speech ends and hate speech begins.

Looking back to 1926, we can be optimistic: statistics soon entered a golden age. But we must also be cautious: that progress was earned only after confronting pseudoscience and learning from costly policy mistakes. Must the next golden age of statistics be equally hard won?

I believe we can better position the Washington Statistical Society to fulfill its mission with three changes:

1. Bridge the generation gap. Currently, one quarter of members joined before 2000 while another quarter joined in 2023 or later. The society should seek events that appeal equally to members with both 2- and 20-years' experience. (This problem is not new, see Allen 1988).

2. Make volunteering easier. Many functions require coordination among multiple people, leading to back-and-forth email and fragile handoffs. Roles and transitions should be streamlined as the American Statistical Association did in 2003 (see Mason 2015).

3. Make programming predictable. Seminars should be held on the same day each month to make turnout more reliable. Unreliable event dates and turnouts make it difficult to attract speakers, volunteers, and new members— in particular established statisticians with busy schedules. See Cohen (2014) for a discussion of how established statisticians were key in shaping the Washington Statistical Society.

I invite members to discuss these and other opportunities and challenges. In 1976, five past presidents of the American Statistical Association addressed members of the Washington Statistical Society at the annual dinner in celebration of the 50th anniversary. To celebrate the 100th anniversary, I have invited five past presidents of the Washington Statistical Society to speak at a proposed session of the Joint Statistical Meetings: Dan Kasprzyk (1986-87), Phil Kott (1996-97), John Czajka (2004-05), and Linda Young (2017-2018). Hopefully through this session and other activities planned throughout the year, we can chart a path for sustaining the Washington Statistical Society for the next 100 years.

References

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Cohen, Michael P. "Influential Statisticians of Yesteryear Active in the Washington Statistical Society." *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences* 100.3 (2014): 7-20.

Mason, Robert L., and John D. McKenzie Jr. "A Brief History of the American Statistical Association, 1990–2014." *The American Statistician* 69.2 (2015): 68-78.

~ Jonathan Auerbach

COX LECTURE & DINNER

GREAT TIME WA$ HAD BY ALL!

WHO'S IN SPOTLIGHT THIS TIME?

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Introducing your fellow members and showcasing the diversity of the WSS

Meet W$$ Member Nathan Cruze ...

With over 11 years in federal service, Nathan Cruze is a senior statistician at NASA Langley Research Center. His work at NASA focuses on the planning and execution of community noise studies featuring the novel X-59 demonstrator aircraft. These studies will demonstrate the potential of low-noise supersonic flight over land while collecting important data for aviation regulators. Prior to joining NASA in 2021, he served as a mathematical statistician in the Research and Development Division at USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) for more than eight years. His research at NASS focused on improving economic and crop estimates through modeling with a focus on small area estimation. In 2020 and 2021, he led teams at NASS to convert the published Farm Labor, Cash Rents, and Crops County Estimates data products into model-based official statistics. The latter team was recognized within the USDA Research, Education, and Economics mission area with the Undersecretary's Award. Nathan previously served as co-chair of the FCSM interest group on Computational Statistics for the Production of Official Statistics. He is a member of the ASA Committee on Career Development, and he served as the 2024 chair of the GSS/SSS Wray Jackson Smith Scholarship committee. He holds bachelor's degrees in economics and mathematics, a master's degrees in economics and statistics, and a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Programs, all from Ohio State University.

Where do you work and what do you do?

I work at NASA Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia. I am a senior statistician in the Engineering Directorate where I am fully supported by the NASA Commercial Supersonic Technology Project. I work on the Community Test Planning and Execution subteam, which supports the final phase of the Quesst mission that will fly the X-59 demonstrator aircraft over select communities in the US. As we await the first flight of the X-59, my day-to-day focuses on independent research, developing study requirements and documents, and evaluating contractor deliverables related to noise exposure estimation and community surveys. I have done pop-up consulting with other NASA projects, including reliability statistics for select components of a LiDAR instrument concept, and discussing sample design for a remote psychoacoustic study. Also, I am a subject matter expert assisting the ICAO Committee on Aviation Environmental Protection supersonics task group.

What attracted you to your current position?

"Airplane go zooOOOom!" shouted Nathan's inner child. The opening at NASA appeared

near the end of the fiscal and performance year at a time when I would likely be taking on new tasks no matter what I chose. The position required an unusual amalgam of design of experiments, survey, and modeling expertise, and it would mean being one of few statisticians (by title) at the agency. It offered new experiences as a federal statistician working outside the mission areas of official statistical agencies and outside of Washington, D.C. I accepted an initial term appointment through 2025 and relocated during the still-ongoing pandemic. The position has proven to be a small but relevant piece in an ambitious project and team sport dedicated to measuring something that hasn't existed before.

What skills are most important for the next generation of statistics professionals?
"If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions." Einstein (probably) In some ways a strong technical tool set is almost a foregone conclusion coming fresh out of school with a statistics (or related) degree, and it should enable you to acquire more skills where needed. I think the ability to communicate and ask useful questions in order to clarify a goal are vital skill statistics professionals must develop. Then working backwards from that, you can work out or negotiate problem solving strategy, data requirements, viable analysis tools, and timelines. To that end, thought processes surrounding design of experiments should never go out of style. I think the profession as a whole will also be made to chart a course through, alongside, or behind the AI revolution. Those skills are still being defined. I would encourage the next generation to invest and contribute their own solutions and understanding.

Finish this sentence: "I joined WSS to..."
...meet fellow DC area statisticians and learn with and from them. I have taken advantage of some of the many organized conference sessions, seminars, and short courses. Early in my career, I was encouraged to give a seminar on crop yield forecasting model in one of the WSS seminars, and it was a valuable learning experience. WSS has opened some important doors to training, service, professional opportunities, and friendships.

What was your first job?
My first full time job was mathematical statistician at the National Agricultural Statistics Service where I happily served from 2013 to 2021. My first project at NASS involved study of the area-frame and multi-frame survey total estimators for the state of Nebraska which manifested unusual `outlier' behavior. Some of the estimated totals showed cyclical fluctuation related to annual crop rotations, e.g., extremely large corn acreage totals one year, extremely high soybean totals the next. Since operations remain in sample for five years, those that did not conform to their geographic stratum definitions were being weighted too aggressively. Rather than ad hoc correction or reweighting, the better fix would be an area frame update made by the excellent geographers and cartographers at NASS. I learned that agricultural land use is not static, that sample frame maintenance is necessary (even for a frame defined by state borders), and that survey weighting is challenging.

Why did you join the statistics profession?

John Tukey's observation about playing in everyone else's backyard comes to mind, but my path to that shared realization and appropriate statistics training was somewhat circuitous. Given my love of math and science studies in high school, I entered undergraduate study at Ohio State as an engineering major. I meandered to an economics major by way of electives for an architecture degree, and then I became a math double major after the fact. My graduate studies began in the OSU economics program, but I gravitated toward the mathematics of constrained optimization and econometrics. I transferred with my masters degree in economics to the statistics program at Ohio State where I earned an M.S. in statistics and a Ph.D. in interdisciplinary programs (statistics, chemical engineering, and environmental economics). I was actively job seeking as I neared my dissertation defense, and I got the offer from USDA NASS in mid-2013. I've been a statistician in the civil service ever since.

What is the most interesting statistical project you have worked on recently?

My own research emphasis has focused on designs for binary regression experiments, covariate measurement error, and development of data management plans for internal consumption, but there are many fascinating statistical aspects underlying community testing during the Quesst mission. Examples include: a binary classification problem in signal processing of shaped sonic boom waveforms within microphone recordings, spatial data fusion of sparse microphone measurements and physics-based models to estimate noise doses at all points over an exceptionally large (> 600 sq. nautical miles) test region, survey design and administration to capture the human perceptual experience to a new noise phenomenon, and many flavors of regression to relate objective measurements to the perceptual experience in a dose-response model. We are working our way through the complex choreography needed to conduct repeated overflights of an exotic aircraft, each followed by prompt surveys of the general public.

If you could have dinner with 3 people from history, who would they be?

I would have dinner with mathematician-astronomer Johannes Kepler, theologian-physician Albert Schweitzer, and President Jimmy Carter.

What is your favorite meal or local restaurant?

I like sea food in general, and we are blessed with options in coastal Virginia. My favorite local restaurants are The Deadrise (named for a traditional style of fishing boat used by Chesapeake Bay fisherman) and Crab Shack on the James. Both feature tasty food, but I really love the views along the James River as it flows toward the Chesapeake Bay and on to the Atlantic Ocean. At the latter, I've seen bald eagles and even a small family of dolphins as I walked along the pier.

How do you like to spend your free time away from work?

I got married on Groundhog's Day 2024! My wife, Ruiyi Li, is also a federal statistician working at NSF NCSES on cyber workforce measurement. (Shoutout to my wingmen Yang Cheng and Lu Chen of USDA NASS for introducing us!) My wife and I like to make the best of the many museums and historic sites between DC and the Hampton Roads area (Yorktown, Jamestown,

Williamsburg to name a few). We enjoy excursions at local parks and beaches, and we like to try new restaurants and cuisines when we get the chance. For my own part, I enjoy gaming (video and board), listening to music, and I hope to put many more miles on a recently purchased gravel bike.

What is your greatest accomplishment?

My greatest professional accomplishment to date was leading the implementation of model-based crop county estimates at USDA NASS. I got to be part of something from conceptualization and research to successful publication of a data product several years later. The experience taught me lessons in change management, complete with some setbacks, and it helped me grow as a leader and a bit of a project manager. I worked with MANY exceptional people in multiple field offices and headquarters divisions at USDA NASS along the way. Our team received a recognition from the under secretary of the USDA Research, Education, and Economics mission area in 2021.

SPOTLIGHT A WSS MEMBER

Are You Interested in Being Featured in the Washington Statistical Society Spotlight of WSS News?

Request follows: Please respond via the following link: https://forms.gle/xSx1cRricFJsRYoU7

In advance, I thank you for any consideration you may provide regarding the aforementioned request, and I hope you have a superb day.

Respectfully submitted,

~ Point-of-Contact: Communications Chair for the time being

HAPPY 10TH ANNIVERSARY TO THE WSS MENTORING PROGRAM!

IMAGINE THAT!

The Washington Statistical Society Mentoring Program is now ten years old. In 2014, David Morganstein proposed that the WSS start a mentoring program and supported a three-year pilot. The initiative to begin mentoring programs in sections and chapters was led by the ASA Committee on Applied Statisticians, with spearheaded by Eric Vance, now at UC Boulder, and Erin Tanenbaum, who became the 2021 WSS President. The following year, it expanded as one of Morganstein's presidential initiatives.

The committee discussed its purpose because mentoring programs require members' commitment and effort. There must be a solid reason. We believed that reason was to build community (Washington Statistical Society Builds Community Through Mentoring, September 2016).

Each year, we have a six-month formal period. It was easier to recruit mentors for this limited timeframe. It increased the focus on achieving short-term goals. We recruited mentors so we knew how many mentees we could support. Many mentor-mentee pairs continued meeting regularly, usually once a month or as needed.

The committee stepped up and rotated in new members. Tom Krenzke (2018 President) made a resolution for one member at large to join the committee.

In 2020, when Michael Messner was chair of the Government Statistics Section (GSS), he proposed combining our mentoring programs. Many members were located in the Washington area. We could benefit from additional help and potential new mentors, and the GSS could gain from our organization.

In 2022, President Jill Dever suggested creating a Mentor workshop to upload on YouTube, which remains a valuable resource today.

In 2023, we merged with the Food and Drug Association Statistics Association (FDASA). They had a different timetable and more restrictions on pairing, but we managed to make it work.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, GW students, many of whom are Chinese, were taking all their classes from their apartments and were afraid to go out.
Little stories: Long-term mentors like Cathy Furlong and Anna Nevius? We have had mentors come back year after year.

Mid-career mentees need more effort to match.

~ Mark Otto

WSS BOARD OF DIRECTORS, PROGRAMS & COMMITTEES

Last updated on 9/15/2025

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Social and Demographic Statistics	Open		

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Student Representative Chair	Ujjayini Das	7/1/25-6/30/26	ujstat (umd.edu)
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	Pushpal Mukhopadhyay	7/1/25-6/30/26	pushpalm (gmail.com)

	Adele Fu	7/1/25-6/30/26	Afu1 (terpmail.umd.edu)
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	Open		
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WSS Representative	Devi Chelluri	1/1/23-12/31/25	Chelluri-Devi (norc.org)
Shiskin Award Committee	See the ASA website for a full list of committee members and terms		

FROM THE WSS NEWS EDITOR

Email items to wss.editor@gmail.com.

The authors are responsible for verifying the contents of their submissions. Submissions requiring extensive revisions on length and/or contents will be returned. Announcements with track changes will not be accepted.

Feel free to also send items to the following: chachi.fan@dot.gov, mark.ot2o@gmail.com.

PLEASE DO NOT SUBMIT YOUR ITEMS IN PDF OR IN THE BODY OF AN EMAIL.

Lastly, we are excited to roll-out our 2025 WSS Brochure! Enjoy!

https://washstat.org/documents/WSSbroch2025.pdf