WSS

The Washington Statistical Society

SINCE 1926

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



A Message from WSS's President Lisa B. Mirel

To the Washington, DC Statistical and Data Science Community,

It is a great honor to serve as the 2026-2027 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.

Our role as a regional society remains crucial. The Washington DC area continues to be a center for federal statistics, scientific research, and data-informed decision making. 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.

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 will all become stronger, more connected, and impactful the more we work together. To learn more about me, please see the spotlight at the end of the newsletter. I look forward to meeting you all.

Warmly,
Lisa

WSS ANNUAL REPORT

Entering Our Second Century: Annual Report from the Washington Statistical Society (July 2025-June 2026)



Benmei Liu
WSS President, 2025-2026

The 2025–2026 service year (July 1, 2025–June 30, 2026) marked a defining chapter in the history of the Washington Statistical Society (WSS). As the Society celebrated its 100th anniversary, it reflected on a century of contributions to the statistical profession while launching new initiatives to strengthen member engagement, expand partnerships, and prepare for the future. Despite significant challenges in the first half of the year, the second half demonstrated the resilience and dedication of our members and volunteers, making it one of the Society's most active and successful years in recent memory.

During the fall of 2025, external factors affecting member availability and event planning significantly disrupted WSS activities. As a result, the Morris Hansen Lecture and Roger Herriot Award Lecture were postponed until spring 2026, and the traditional WSS Holiday Party was canceled. Despite these challenges, WSS resumed a full slate of activities beginning in January.

The Society's centennial celebration began on January 20, 2026, held at NORC in Washington, DC, where more than 75 attendees, including past WSS presidents, current members, the ASA President, and the ASA Executive Director, gathered to celebrate the Society's rich history and enduring impact. As part of the centennial initiative, WSS also updated its history book to document the Society's first 100 years through June 30, 2026.

WSS continued to expand its programming throughout the spring. In February, the Society hosted its first student representative-led event, the *Petals and Probabilities* Cherry Blossom Forecast Hackathon at Georgetown University Capitol Campus, bringing together students to apply statistical modeling to predict Washington's peak bloom date. The postponed 33rd Annual Morris Hansen Lecture was successfully held in March at Summit Consulting, LLC, in Washington, DC, attracting more than 100 attendees for a presentation by Dr. Partha Lahiri and discussions by Dr. Rebecca Steorts and Lisa Mirel. In June, the President's Invited Talk and Annual Awards Ceremony was held at Westat in Bethesda, Maryland, drawing more than 65 attendees. The event featured a keynote by Dr. Travis Hoppe on artificial intelligence and the future of evidence, followed by a fireside chat with Dr. Liz Mannshardt. The ceremony also

recognized recipients of the Society's major awards, expanded the President's Award to honor three centennial cohorts, and celebrated nine WSS members elected as 2026 ASA Fellows.

Virtual programming remained a cornerstone of WSS activities. The Society hosted the Roger Herriot Award Seminar, the Gertrude M. Cox Award Lecture, and a webinar by Dr. Jae-Kwang Kim on calibration estimation, together engaging hundreds of participants. WSS also collaborated with RTI International on a webinar series exploring emerging topics in survey research. The inaugural virtual panel, *Small Area Estimation and the Future of Survey Research*, attracted more than 165 attendees. Additional panels on artificial intelligence and other emerging topics are planned.

Beyond programming, WSS strengthened its organizational foundation by filling several previously vacant volunteer positions, including Student Representatives, reviving the newsletter's employment column as *Job Seeker's Ally*, and successfully conducting its annual officer elections through a competitive slate process.

The Society also expanded its collaborations across the statistical community. WSS continued its partnership with DC-AAPOR in planning the annual DC-AAPOR/WSS Review Preview Conference scheduled for September 9, 2026, sponsored several professional meetings and educational activities, initiated a collaboration with the International Association of Survey Statisticians to develop future short courses, and strengthened partnerships supporting jointly sponsored awards such as the Julius Shiskin Award and the Roger Herriot Award.

As part of its centennial celebrations, WSS also partnered with several ASA sections to host a joint mixer at the 2026 Joint Statistical Meetings (JSM) in Boston, marking the Society's first networking mixer at JSM. In addition, WSS organized a topic-contributed session, *A Century of Washington Statistics*, featuring five past WSS presidents reflecting on the Society's history, accomplishments, and future.

As a chapter of the American Statistical Association (ASA), WSS sincerely appreciates ASA's continued support. The quarterly meetings of ASA chapter presidents have provided valuable opportunities to exchange ideas, learn from other chapters, and strengthen local statistical communities.

Looking ahead, WSS continues to face challenges, including securing stable venues for in-person events, obtaining financial sponsorship, and recruiting volunteers. As we begin our second century, our priorities include growing membership, increasing engagement among students and early-career statisticians, strengthening partnerships, and embracing the opportunities and challenges that artificial intelligence presents for our profession.

The accomplishments of the past year would not have been possible without the dedication of our Board members, committee chairs, volunteers, sponsors, partner organizations, and members. Their commitment has enabled WSS to enter its second century with renewed energy, strong momentum, and an exciting vision for the future.



Outgoing WSS President Benmei Liu, incoming WSS President Lisa Mirel, and several award recipients at the June 17, 2026, WSS Annual Award Ceremony. Left to right: Lloyd Hicks, Lisa Mirel, Ujjayini Das, Wesley C. DeMontigny, Ethan Chen, Patrick Roney, Benmei Liu, Glenn White, Rishik Shenolikar, and Callie Deng.
For the WSS annual report published by Amstat news, see
https://magazine.amstat.org/blog/2026/09/01/wssboard/

REMEMBERING A COMMUNITY MEMBER



Mel Kollander

1939–2026

By Phil Kalina, WSS member and former board member, with contributions by Mike Fleming, John Czajka, Michael P. Cohen, and Catherine Burk

It is my sad responsibility to note the passing of long-time WSS member, Mel Kollander. He was a great friend to me and many others. It is Mel who brought me to WSS and to the ASA.
Melvin Kollander was born in New York City on December 10, 1939. After graduating from the Bronx High School of Science, Mel earned a bachelor's degree in Statistics and Operations Research from New York University and a master's degree from the New School for Social Research.

Mel began his professional career as a research statistician/economist with AT&T in downtown Manhattan. In 1967, he joined MITRE Corporation and transferred to their Virginia location. In 1972, Mel began working as a statistician for the Social Security Administration before joining the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1979, where he remained until 1994.

At EPA, Mel served as a principal survey statistician and managed its Small Community Information and Data Program. His work included studies of indoor air exposure and its effects on health. He served for six years as an adviser to the Government of Kuwait and worked extensively in survey design, human exposure assessment, and statistical methodology for the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Health Organization. One of his notable assignments in Kuwait followed the 1991 war with Iraq, where he studied the health effects of smoke from burning oil wells. After leaving EPA, Mel served as head of the Survey Methods Unit at the National Centre for Social Research in London.

In 1995 Mel founded and directed the Washington office of Temple University's Institute for Survey Research, where he formed and led a research department focused on social issues through 2005. Over the course of his career, he wrote numerous statistical papers and was a co-author of The New Standard Environmental Inventory Questionnaire for Estimation of Indoor Concentrations.

Mel was an accomplished and respected statistician and economist. He was elected to membership in the International Statistical Institute, was a member of the International Association of Survey Statisticians, and in 2013 was elected as a Fellow of the American Statistical Association.

With the Washington Statistical Society, in addition to being a long-time member, Mel served as a representative at large from 2011-2013 and as chair or co-chair of the Agriculture and Natural Resources committee from 2002-2005 and from 2007-2015.

Mel never stopped learning, growing, and finding meaningful ways to help others. In 2010, he co-founded the Senior Statisticians Society which held regular speaker events. With his wife, Lidia, Mel continued serving his community with a tax preparation and accounting practice.
Mel died on September 1, 2026, after a brief illness. He is survived by his wife Lidia, sister Carrol, his children and grandchildren, and many friends, tennis mates, and colleagues from New York, greater DC, Philadelphia, Peru, and Europe.

A graveside service was held on September 4 at King David Memorial Gardens in Falls Church, Virginia.

REFLECTIONS ON RECENT EVENTS

DC-AAPOR/WSS Annual Review Preview Conference



On September 9th, 2026, the DC-Baltimore Chapter of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (DC-AAPOR) and the Washington Statistical Society (WSS) hosted the 15th Annual Review Preview conference at Gallup in downtown DC. The conference brought together a sample of exemplary presentations that have been or will be taking place at national and international conferences such the annual AAPOR Conference, the Joint Statistical Meetings (JSM), the Federal Computer Assisted Survey Information Collection (FedCASIC) Workshop, the International Statistical Institute World Statistics Congress, and more. It was an opportunity to share work with local colleagues, hear what others are doing, and connect with colleagues in person.



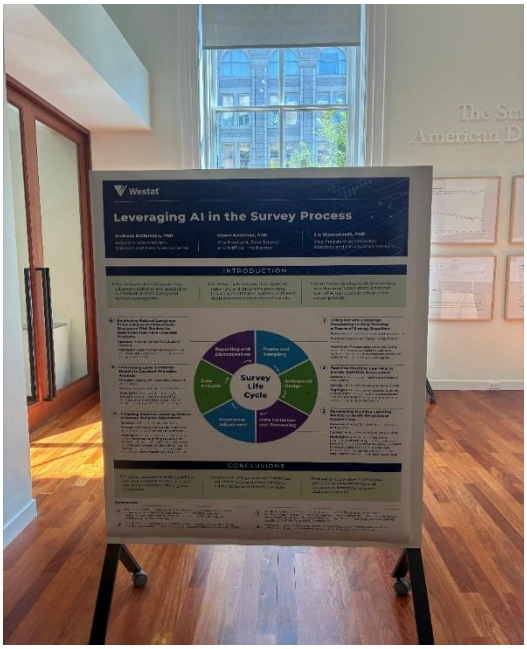
This year's conference had record attendance with over 150 attendees and included over 50 presentations and 8 posters. We were incredibly lucky to have Gallup serve as the site sponsor; NORC, RWJF, and Knowledge Panel as platinum sponsors; Westat, SRSS, and Miravoice as gold sponsors, and Survey160 and ForsMarsh serving as silver sponsors.



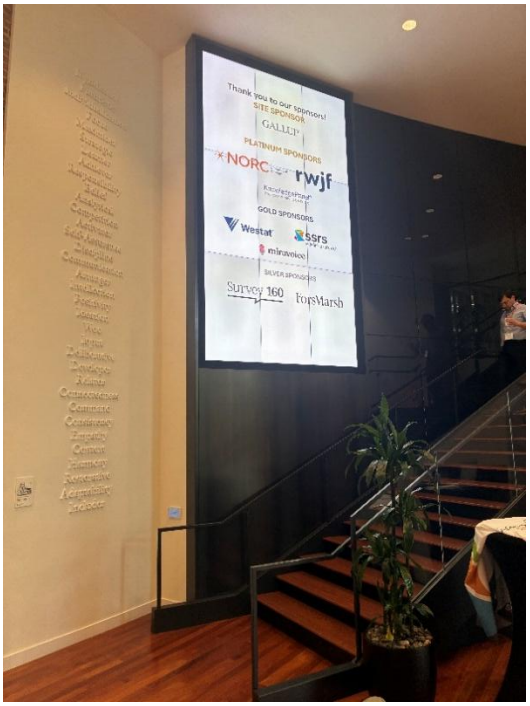


The presentations covered a diverse set of topics in survey research, including public trust and misinformation, questionnaire design, data collection methods, statistical modeling, and public opinion. A major focus was the use of artificial intelligence in survey research, including questionnaire evaluation, translation, text analysis, synthetic respondents, and survey operations. Sessions also addressed sampling, weighting, respondent engagement, election-related attitudes, and innovations in federal statistics. The program included research presentations, a poster session, and a panel discussion on entrepreneurship and independent consulting in the evolving research landscape.

The day concluded with a happy hour and networking at Dirty Habit. We are delighted with how the day went and we are excited to start planning for next year!









UPCOMING EVENTS

Save The Date!



Morris Hansen Lecture & WSS Holiday Party
Mark your calendars for a special evening as the Washington Statistical Society brings together two favorite annual traditions: the **Morris Hansen Lecture** and the **WSS Holiday Party**.

Date: Tuesday, February 2, 2027
Location: Summit Consulting (777 6th St NW, Washington, DC 20001)

Join colleagues, friends, and fellow statisticians for an engaging lecture, networking opportunities, and a celebration of another year of contributions to the statistical community. Additional details, including the featured speaker and registration information, will be announced soon.

And yes, the event falls on **Groundhog Day**. While we can't predict whether the groundhog will see its shadow, we can confidently forecast an excellent evening of statistics, conversation, and holiday cheer. **Save the date now and plan to join us!**

Something exciting is blooming… stay tuned!



Calling all student statisticians, data enthusiasts, and curious minds! The Washington Statistical Society is bringing back **WSS Students' Day: Petals and Probabilities** for another exciting celebration of statistics, collaboration, and the beauty of the cherry blossom season!

Building on the success of our inaugural event, we're looking forward to bringing students together to explore the fascinating intersection of data science, predictive modeling, and the National Cherry Blossom Festival. Expect a fun-filled opportunity to put your statistical skills to the test, exchange ideas, connect with fellow students and WSS members, and discover how statistics can help us understand the world around us – even when it comes to predicting peak bloom!

Think data. Think blossoms. Think probabilities!

Our next *Petals and Probabilities* event is coming in February 2027. Stay tuned for more details on what's in store, and share with others who may be interested. We can't wait to see you there!

UPCOMING SEMINARS

ASA Roger Herriot Award Recipient Seminar



The winner of the 2026 Roger Herriot Award for Innovation in Federal Statistics, **Terrance Savitsky**, will be presenting a seminar hosted by WSS.

Title: Privacy Amplification for Synthetic Data Using Range Restrictions

Date/Time: November 18, 2026 from 3:00-4:00pm ET

Link to register: https://instats.org/seminar/privacy-amplification-for-range-restrict

Co-authors: Monika (Jingchen) Hu (Binghamton Univeristy), Matthew Williams (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)

Biography: Terrance Savitsky is a Senior Research Mathematical Statistician at the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics specializing in Bayesian methods for survey data.

Abstract: We introduce a new class of range-restricted formal data privacy standards that condition on owner's beliefs about sensitive data ranges. By incorporating this additional information, we can provide a stronger privacy guarantee (e.g., an amplification). The range-restricted formal privacy standards protect only a subset (or ball) of data values and exclude ranges (or balls) believed to be already publicly known. The privacy standards are designed for the risk-weighted pseudo posterior mechanism (PPM) used to generate synthetic data under an asymptotic differential (aDP) privacy guarantee. The PPM downweights the (log-)likelihood contribution for each record proportionally to its disclosure risk. The PPM is adapted under inclusion of beliefs by adjusting the risk-weighted pseudo likelihood. We introduce two alternative adjustments. The first expresses data owner's knowledge of the sensitive range as a probability, λ, that a datum value drawn from the underlying generating distribution lies outside the ball or subspace of values that are sensitive. The portion of each datum likelihood contribution deemed sensitive is then $(1 - \lambda i) \leq 1$ and is the only portion of the likelihood subject to risk down-weighting. The second adjustment encodes knowledge as the probability masses $P(Ri) \leq 1$ between the edges of the sensitive range, Ri. We use the resulting conditional pseudo likelihood for a sensitive record, which boosts its worst case tail values away from 0. We compare privacy and utility properties for the PPM under the aDP and range-restricted privacy standards through a series of simulation studies and a real data application to an accelerated life testing dataset

More information on the Roger Herriot Award as well as the upcoming seminar can be found on the WSS website. https://washstat.org/awards/herriot.html

STUDENT'S CORNER

Student Tavel Award Winner, Aditi Sen

Presented here is her essay on her experience attending JSM 2026



Joint Statistical Meeting (JSM) 2026 was an especially meaningful experience for me because it allowed me to engage with the Statistical community in several different ways by presenting my dissertation research, chairing a session, competing in the Data Expo, and participating in scientific and networking events. Each of these experiences gave me a different perspective on research, communication, collaboration, and professional growth. I am very thankful to the Washington Statistical Society (WSS) for the Student Travel Award, which made it possible for me to take full advantage of these opportunities.

One of the most important parts of JSM was the opportunity to present my dissertation research in the session titled "Small area estimation, Bayesian estimation, and multilevel models". Preparing for the presentation required me to step back from the technical details and think carefully about the larger Statistical question, why it matters, and how to communicate the main contribution clearly. The questions following the presentation also helped me view my work from different perspectives and think about possible future directions. The experience reinforced that communicating research effectively is an essential part of doing good research. At JSM, I also had the opportunity to chair a session titled "Innovations in analysis of complex survey data". This gave me a different perspective on scientific meetings because my responsibility extended beyond my own research. This was a valuable leadership experience and gave me a better understanding of how productive academic discussions are created.

Another major highlight was participating in the Data Expo challenge with my friends and winning the competition. We began with an interesting dataset on education and had to decide which questions were most interesting, how best to analyze them, and how to communicate our findings clearly. Working as a team showed me how much statistical problem-solving benefits from different perspectives. Winning was exciting, but the most valuable lesson was that alongside technical methodology, a successful data analysis also requires creativity, collaboration, judgment, and effective Statistical storytelling.

JSM also gave me the opportunity to learn from leading researchers in Statistics. I attended major lectures such as the IMS Medallion Lecture and the COPSS Award Ceremony and Lecture, along with panel discussions, contributed sessions, and poster sessions. These experiences exposed me to important ideas beyond my own research area and showed me how established

researchers formulate broad questions, connect different areas of Statistics, and communicate complex ideas. Poster sessions were especially useful because they allowed for direct conversations with presenters about their methods, challenges, and future research directions.

An equally important part of JSM was the opportunity to network and interact with the broader Statistical community. As a first-time attendee, I participated in the First-Time Attendee event, the JSM Mixer, the Student Mixer, and several section and chapter mixers including reconnecting with friends from the SRMS community. These events made such a large conference feel much more approachable. I met students and researchers from different institutions, career stages, and areas of Statistics, and learned about their research interests, career paths, and experiences. These conversations helped me see networking not simply as making professional contacts, but as a way of learning from others and becoming more connected to the statistical community. JSM was also enjoyable beyond the formal academic program, with fun touches such as free professional headshots (appearing here), interesting giveaways and activities at the Expo booths, and the opportunity to explore and enjoy the beautiful Boston Seaport setting throughout the conference.

I returned from JSM with new ideas for my research and a broader understanding of the kind of Statistician I hope to become. Someone who not only develops statistical methodology, but also communicates it clearly, learns and collaborates with others, and contributes actively to the Statistical community. I am sincerely thankful to WSS for making this experience possible and making me even more enthusiastic about continuing my career in Statistics.

Join The Joint WSS/GSS Mentoring Program

We are excited to announce that the joint WSS/GSS mentoring program is now recruiting both **mentors** and **mentees** for the 2026-2027 term!

Who: Any mentor or mentee who is officially a Washington Statistical Society (WSS) or Government Statistical Section (GSS) member (must pay dues by the beginning of the program).

What: This is a one-on-one do-it-yourself mentorship. For more seasoned professionals in the statistical fields to provide advice, resources, feedback, and perspectives, helping the mentee to get to where s/he would like to be professionally.

When: January 2027-June 2027

Where: on the phone, on video chat, or face-to-face

Meeting others in our profession can help us quickly learn the ropes, advance our careers, and contribute to the statistical profession. To facilitate engagement and encourage the transfer of valuable experience among members of the Washington Statistical Society (WSS) and the Government Statistical Section (GSS) of the American Statistical Association, the WSS and GSS have teamed up to offer this joint mentoring program to our members. (The program is also open to nonmembers, but they will need to join WSS or GSS). Matching mentors and mentees offers a great opportunity for mentees to develop as statisticians, mentors to "give back" to newer members of our profession, and for everyone to stay connected to the WSS and GSS.

What are the benefits of joining the program?

The potential benefits of participating in the program as a mentee are described well by the Do-It-Yourself Mentorship handout from the ASA Committee on Applied Statisticians:

For mentors: (1) A connection with skills and perspectives of recently trained professionals, (2) development and enhancement of communication and leadership skills, and (3) satisfaction of passing on skills and knowledge that can enhance the career and personal growth of the mentee and contribute to the maturity of the profession. The program may answer important questions, including: How do you identify and introduce opportunities to others? How do you describe your own experiences to others to encourage them to take more strategic risks? How do you guide others to network effectively? Mentors usually get more from their relationships by learning something along the way about the new challenges of their mentees.

For mentees: 1) a role model, but more accurately a sounding board, for questions about professional development and career insight; 2) a source of perspective, encouragement, and motivation leading to greater self-confidence and esteem; 3) help in establishing professional development plans, career goals and acceleration of their achievement; and 4) a source of professional/social contacts with other applied statisticians in the field – "plugs you into the power network". The mentoring program may answer important questions, including: How do

you create opportunities for yourself? How do you promote yourself? How do you network with others? How did you get to where you want to be? What are the next steps?

The WSS Mentoring Program committee hosted a previous mentoring workshop to introduce the program and encourage people to participate in the program. The recording of the workshop can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyE-eKjaBCU.

How does the WSS/GSS Mentoring Program work?

If you are an interested WSS or GSS member (or potential member), simply complete an application and information form, which can be found on the WSS website, WashStat.org/mentoring/, and select your desired role (mentor, mentee, or both) during registration. The information will be used to match you to a mentor or mentee, taking into account each stage of your career, area of statistical expertise, and goals. After matching, emails will be sent out to mentors and mentees to introduce them to each other. Program materials will be provided to help guide the mentors and mentees through potential conversations, although the topics discussed are up to the mentors and mentees themselves. The program will continue through the correspondence between the mentor and mentee for at least six months into the late Spring of 2027. Those in the program will meet at least monthly either on the phone, on video chat, or face-to-face. Participants will be asked to complete a short evaluation survey at the end of that period to learn and improve the program. We encourage mentors and mentees to continue to meet after the formal program period ends if it is mutually productive.

The direct signup link is:

WSS/GSS Mentoring Program 2026-2027 (google.com)

You can find more information from the following resources:

The WSS website: http://washstat.org/mentoring/;

The GSS mentoring website: https://community.amstat.org/governmentstatisticssection/professionaldevelopmentmentoring/mentoring;

If you are interested but have questions about the program, please contact:

- Adele Fu (adelejiafu@gmail.com)
- Pushpal Mukhopadhyay (pushpalm@gmail.com)
- Julie Gershunskaya (Gershunskaya.Julie@bls.gov)
- Amy Lin (amylin@westat.com)
- Mark Otto (mark.ot2o@gmail.com)
- Mandi Yu (yu.mandi@gmail.com)
- Qilu Yu (qilu.yu@nih.gov)

2027 WSS Student Travel Competition Application

The Washington Statistical Society (WSS) is offering travel support to a local area student in a statistics (or related discipline) degree program. The support includes $800 plus early-bird student conference registration to one American Statistical Society (ASA) meeting or conference between July 1, 2027 and June 30, 2028. A full list of eligible events may be found on ASA's website. Applicants are strongly encouraged to attend one or more eligible events. A one-year student membership to the ASA and a one-year student membership to the WSS are also granted to the winner.

Applications are **due at 11:59 p.m. EST on November 15, 2026**, and the winner will receive notification by January 15, 2027.

Eligibility

Applicants must be enrolled in the fall 2026 semester in a degree-seeking program in DC, MD, or VA. Eligible majors include statistics or related disciplines (applied statistics, biostatistics, data science, etc.). Previous WSS Student Travel Award winners are not eligible.

Application Process

Applications must include:

1. The completed application form, found on our website, https://washstat.org/awards/student_travel_competition_2027.pdf.
2. A copy of the most recent transcript or advising report from your university.
3. A double-spaced essay, no more than two pages, describing: your interest in statistics (including projects, internships, and/or assistantships) and activities to help improve the field of statistics (including teaching, mentoring, advising, collaborating, and service), and your interest in attending and presenting at an ASA meeting or conference.
4. A letter of support from a faculty member or ASA member, indicating knowledge of any funding support the student has already received to attend an ASA meeting or conference.

To apply, please email your academic transcripts, essay, and completed application form to the WSS Student Travel Competition Chair, ***Oksana Balabay*** (OksanaBalabay@westat.com) and please CC the WSS President ***Lisa Mirel*** (lbmirel6@gmail.com) with the subject line "WSS STUDENT TRAVEL COMPETITION". The letter of support should be sent by the reference.

Deadlines & Requirements

1. The applicants email the application package to the WSS Student Travel Competition Chair with the subject line "WSS STUDENT TRAVEL COMPETITION" by 11:59 p.m. EST on November 15, 2026.
2. The competition winner is notified by January 15, 2027.
3. The competition winner must confirm their travel support acceptance by January 20, 2027. Failure to confirm the travel support may lead to removal as a winner.
4. The competition winner attends an ASA meeting or conference between July 1, 2027 and June 30, 2028.
5. The competition winner attends the WSS Annual Dinner in the spring of 2027, where they are recognized. The cost of the dinner is covered by the WSS.
6. The competition winner prepares an essay on their experience at the ASA meeting/conference. The essay will be published in the upcoming WSS Newsletter.

The applicants can address any questions to the WSS Student Travel Competition Chair, Oksana Balabay (OksanaBalabay@westat.com).

Good luck, and we hope to see you at an ASA meeting/conference in the near future!

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

WSS Spotlight Interview
Lisa B. Mirel

Meet WSS Member Lisa Mirel…



Lisa Mirel is a Program Director at National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics within the US National Science Foundation. Lisa directs the Center's priorities related to survey design, statistical standards, privacy and confidentiality, data quality, and demonstration projects to inform the development of a future National Secure Data Service.

1. Where do you work and what do you do?
I am the Director of the Statistics and Methods Program at the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics within the US National Science Foundation.

2. What attracted you to your current position?
Having worked primarily at public health agencies, I developed a deep appreciation for the federal statistical system and its role in shaping data driven decision making and advancing scientific knowledge. What attracted me to my current position was the opportunity to contribute to the federal statistical system from a new perspective, applying my experience to support the National Secure Data Service Demonstration project, furthering work on data quality, and supporting innovative research.

3. What skills are most important for the next generation of statistics professionals?
In my opinion, the most important skills for the next generation of statistics professionals are flexibility and curiosity.

4. Finish this sentence: "I joined WSS to…"
I joined WSS to meet other statistical professionals in the area and learn from one another.

5. What was your first job?
My first ever job was a hostess at the Jefferson Hill Tea Room in Naperville, IL. My first job in the government was as an ORISE fellow at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, GA.

6. If you could give your 18-year-old self one piece of advice, what would it be?
Don't plan too much, the unexpected turns may turn out to be fruitful.

7. How do you like to spend your free time away from work?
Running races and walking with my dog.

8. What is your favorite meal or local restaurant?
Breakfast is my favorite meal, and my favorite local coffee shop is Java Nation.

9. What's something people might be surprised to learn about you?
I had never taken a statistics class before my master's program in biostatistics.

10. What keeps you motivated in your work?
My colleagues. They brighten every day.

11. What's one piece of advice you'd give to students or early-career professionals?
Try on many hats, you may surprise yourself.

WSS is seeking volunteers to be featured as a WSS Spotlight Member in the WSS Newsletter. The WSS Spotlight is a great opportunity for members to get to know one another by sharing their professional path, research interests, and advice for others in the field.

If you're interested, please complete this short form: https://forms.gle/Pjvir8eYT5VzdZtcA
For any questions, feel free to contact Sungjoo Cho (sungjoocho7@gmail.com).

Thank you in advance for your interest. We look forward to featuring you in an upcoming Spotlight!

JOB SEEKER'S ALLEY

Career Opportunities in Biostatistics in Government Agencies and Nonprofits

ASA Risk Analysis Section Panel Discussion

Date: September 11, 2026

Organizer and Chair: Yichuan Zhao, Professor, Department of Mathematics and Statistics, Georgia State University

Panelists

- Nancy Geller, Director, Office of Biostatistics Research, NHLBI
- Elizabeth Garrett-Mayer, Vice President, Center for Research and Analytics, ASCO
- Dong Wang, Biostatistics Branch Chief, FDA/NCTR
- Gene Pennello, Mathematical Statistician, FDA/CDRH

Introduction

The September 11, 2026, panel discussion hosted by the American Statistical Association (ASA) Risk Analysis Section explored career preparation, employment opportunities, professional development, and the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on biostatistics. The panelists emphasized strong statistical foundations, communication, teamwork, adaptability, and continuous learning as essential to career success.

1. Qualifications Employers Seek

Employers seek candidates who combine statistical knowledge with programming skills, communication abilities, curiosity, and collaboration. Elizabeth Garrett-Mayer emphasized that a solid foundation in mathematical statistics is essential because theoretical knowledge can be difficult to acquire entirely on the job. She also stressed the ability to translate complex statistical findings into clear, actionable information for clinicians, scientists, and other nontechnical audiences.

Dong Wang encouraged students to develop broad statistical knowledge and remain willing to learn unfamiliar methods. Although candidates do not need to master every statistical technique, familiarity with important areas such as survival analysis is valuable. Gene Pennello highlighted teamwork and communication in regulatory environments, where statisticians collaborate with professionals from diverse disciplines. Nancy Geller noted that interview presentations and responses to questions help employers evaluate candidates' technical competence, communication, and enthusiasm.

Key takeaway: Students should develop theoretical depth, practical programming skills, clear communication, and effective teamwork. The ability to explain research findings and demonstrate intellectual curiosity can distinguish candidates with similar academic qualifications.

2. Entry-Level Opportunities for Master's Graduates

Potential entry points include statistical programming, research support, internships, and fellowships. Pharmaceutical companies often hire master's graduates for programming and analytical roles, while government opportunities may include staff fellow positions, and selected federal statistician positions. NIH summer and postbaccalaureate programs can also provide valuable research experience. Applicants should monitor official announcements and plan ahead because federal hiring can take several months.

Key takeaway: Consider statistical programming, research support positions, internships, and fellowships as pathways into the profession. Early practical experience can help bridge the gap between academic training and workplace responsibilities.

3. Choosing a Career Path

The panelists advised students to select careers according to their interests, preferred working environments, and desired responsibilities rather than prestige or external expectations. Garrett-Mayer explained that professionals who enjoy collaborative research and working with clinicians may find applied biostatistics more rewarding than academic positions centered on independent research and grant writing.

Responsibilities also vary within industries. Pharmaceutical statisticians may focus on clinical trials, whereas statisticians in other fields may work on data visualization, business analytics, and broader data-science problems. Government statisticians may contribute to regulatory reviews and public health decisions by evaluating evidence related to medical products and devices.

Informational interviews, internships, professional meetings, and discussions with experienced statisticians can help students understand the differences among career options.

Key takeaway: Evaluate career opportunities based on day-to-day responsibilities, professional interests, and organizational culture. Career paths are not necessarily fixed, and flexibility can create new opportunities.

4. Remaining Competitive in the Job Market

Adaptability, communication, and problem-solving emerged as essential qualities for long-term success. Wang illustrated the importance of continuous learning through advances in bioinformatics, from microarrays to RNA sequencing and single-cell sequencing. These developments demonstrate how quickly analytical methods can change and why statisticians must be prepared to learn new techniques.

Garrett-Mayer emphasized presentation and interpersonal skills, while Geller encouraged candidates to demonstrate initiative and resourcefulness when confronting unfamiliar problems. Employers value individuals who can identify information gaps, consult colleagues, investigate possible solutions, and continue working through difficult challenges.

Candidates should also prepare carefully for interviews by researching the organization, reviewing relevant methods, and practicing presentations. A strong interview demonstrates not only technical knowledge but also the ability to contribute effectively to a team.

Key takeaway: Technical qualifications alone are insufficient. Candidates should demonstrate adaptability, initiative, clear communication, and the ability to solve problems independently and collaboratively.

5. AI, Machine Learning, and Real-World Data

AI and advanced analytical technologies are changing statistical practice, but the panelists agreed that foundational statistical expertise remains indispensable. AI can improve literature searches, summarization, programming, and regulatory review, but its outputs require careful verification.

The FDA is exploring AI applications in regulatory review, while AI-enabled medical devices, diagnostic software, and clinical decision support systems raise new questions about safety, reliability, and performance evaluation. These technologies may require innovative validation approaches that account for complex data structures and multiple information sources.
Statisticians will continue to play a central role in designing analyses, quantifying uncertainty, evaluating evidence, and ensuring methodological rigor. Students should learn modern AI and machine-learning techniques without abandoning probability, mathematical statistics, statistical modeling, and critical reasoning.

Key takeaway: Learn AI tools, machine learning, and modern computing while maintaining strong foundations in probability, mathematical statistics, statistical modeling, and uncertainty quantification.

6. Additional Guidance on Training and Professional Development

The panelists offered several practical recommendations for preparing for professional work:

- **Communication:** Practice explaining research to friends, family, mentors, and colleagues outside statistics. Use concrete examples to show why a research question matters and how statistical analysis contributes to an answer.
- **Methodological preparation:** Develop knowledge of regression, generalized linear models, survival analysis, Bayesian statistics, statistical learning, and causal inference according to the requirements of target positions.
- **Education and career progression:** Both master's and doctoral degrees can lead to rewarding careers. Master's-level statisticians may focus on programming, data analysis, and research operations, while doctoral-level statisticians often assume greater responsibility for study design, protocol development, and independent methodological decisions.

- **Certifications and specialization:** Relevant software training and short courses can strengthen a résumé. Subject-matter expertise in oncology, clinical research, public health, or regulatory science can also help candidates develop a competitive professional profile.
- **Clinical research experience:** Students interested in clinical trials should seek training and opportunities to learn about protocol development, FDA interactions, institutional review board (IRB) reviews, and data and safety monitoring boards (DSMBs). ASA clinical trials training, internships, and research programs can help connect statistical theory with practical applications.
- **Networking and career planning:** Professional meetings, including ASA and Society for Clinical Trials conferences, provide opportunities to learn about emerging methods, meet potential collaborators, and explore employment options. Students interested in government positions should investigate eligibility requirements and begin preparing applications well in advance.

FROM THE WSS NEWS EDITOR

The next WSS Newsletter will be published in January 2027. Any items for consideration of inclusion should be emailed to the editor at 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.

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