

GOVERNMENT STATISTICAL OFFICES AND STATISTICAL LITERACY

Edited by

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Foreword

The objective of this book is to explain the process leading to the emergence of successful, currently active, programs of national statistical offices to educate the general public in “Statistics as the science of data and as a collection of methods to make sense of the numbers that describe the world that surrounds us.” We will consider we have achieved success in this objective if the reader knows clearly, for each project, after reading the book, the following: (a) the process, mission statement and thinking that led to initiate the program; (b) the economic constraints encountered; (c) the alliances made with inside and outside institutions and individuals; (d) the logistics of maintaining the programs; (e) the assessment of the program’s effectiveness and how the existence of this project is made known to the public in general; (f) the ups and downs, what has helped, what has not; (g) the contents of the activities in the programs; (h) the main target group of the program. The reader is invited to play with the lessons, the interactive activities and the exercises in each program before reaching any conclusion. When it comes to learning something, we are all kids and beginners, thus, regarding what the target group is in each program, we should judge the programs by how well they would help a beginner learn Statistics and the specific summary statistics and graphs produced by the government.

The authors of this book were approached by the International Statistical Literacy Project because they are deeply involved in the development of these programs and are in the best position to tell us about them. All of the authors are committed to the improvement of statistical literacy in their countries and have been managing the programs for a long time. By a successful program, we mean a program that has reached the front page of the National Statistical Office web site, that is, a program that constitutes an intrinsic part of the office and that the visitor can readily link to upon opening the web site (be it through an “education” link, or a “for the student” link or some other link pointing to outside learners and the general public. The editor is also a teacher and therefore selected the programs because it was considered that they would also make great complementary tools in any class that tries to introduce Statistics as the science of data, or that tries to explain social and economic summary statistics to students. In addition to that, the programs selected were considered to serve also the educational needs of the media and adults.

With this book, we hope to encourage other government statistical offices that discontinued or never started programs like these to change their minds and go for it. At the same time, we hope to break the myth among academic teachers that “official statistics” is a “collection of lifeless and gruesome numbers, such as the population of your state or the number of violent crimes committed in your city last year.” (Utts and Heckard, 2007).¹

Juana Sanchez, Editor, July 2008

¹ References:

Utts, J. M . and Heckard, R.F. (2007). *Mind on Statistics*. 3rd edition. Thomson/Brooks