
Statisticians

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Significant Points

- Many individuals with degrees in statistics enter jobs that do not have the title statistician.
- A master's degree in statistics or mathematics is the minimum educational requirement for most jobs as a statistician.
- Although slower than average growth is expected in employment of statisticians, job opportunities should remain favorable for individuals with degrees in statistics.

Nature of the Work

Statistics is the scientific application of mathematical principles to the collection, analysis, and presentation of numerical data. Statisticians contribute to scientific inquiry by applying their mathematical and statistical knowledge to the design of surveys and experiments; collection, processing, and analysis of data; and interpretation of the results. Statisticians may apply their knowledge of statistical methods to a variety of subject areas, such as biology, economics, engineering, medicine, public health, psychology, marketing, education, and sports. Many economic, social, political, and military decisions cannot be made without the use of statistical techniques, such as the design of experiments to gain Federal approval of a newly manufactured drug.

One technique that is especially useful to statisticians is sampling—obtaining information about a population of people or group of things by surveying a small portion of the total. For example, to determine the size of the audience for particular programs, television-rating services survey only a few thousand families, rather than all viewers. Statisticians decide where and how to gather the data, determine the type and size of the sample group, and develop the survey questionnaire or reporting form. They also prepare instructions for workers who will collect and tabulate the data. Finally, statisticians analyze, interpret, and summarize the data using computer software.

In business and industry, statisticians play an important role in quality control and in product development and improvement. In an automobile company, for example, statisticians might design experiments to determine the failure time of engines exposed to extreme weather conditions by running individual engines until failure and breakdown. Working for a pharmaceutical company, statisticians might develop and evaluate the results of clinical trials to determine the safety and effectiveness of new medications. And, at a computer software firm, statisticians might help construct new statistical software packages to analyze data more accurately and efficiently. In addition to product development and testing, some statisticians also are involved in deciding what products to manufacture, how much to charge for them, and to whom the products should be marketed. Statisticians also may manage assets and liabilities, determining the risks and returns of certain investments.

Statisticians also are employed by nearly every government agency. Some government statisticians develop surveys that measure population growth, consumer prices, or unemployment. Other statisticians work for scientific, environmental, and agricultural agencies, and may help to determine the amount of

pesticides in drinking water, the number of endangered species living in a particular area, or the number of people afflicted with a particular disease. Statisticians also are employed in national defense agencies, determining the accuracy of new weapons and the likely effectiveness of defense strategies.

Because statistical specialists are employed in so many work areas, specialists who use statistics often have different professional designations. For example, a person using statistical methods on economic data may have the title econometrician, while statisticians in public health and medicine may hold titles such as biostatistician, biometrician, or epidemiologist.

Working Conditions

Statisticians usually work regular hours in comfortable offices. Some statisticians travel to provide advice on research projects, supervise and set up surveys, or gather statistical data. Some may have duties that vary widely, such as designing experiments or performing fieldwork in various communities. Statisticians who work in academia generally have a mix of teaching and research responsibilities.

Employment

Statisticians held about 20,000 jobs in 2002. Eighteen percent of these jobs were in the Federal Government, where statisticians were concentrated in the Departments of Commerce, Agriculture, and Health and Human Services. Another 16 percent were found in State and local governments, including State colleges and universities. Most of the remaining jobs were in private industry, especially in scientific research and development services; office administrative services; insurance carriers; management, scientific, and technical consulting services; and business, professional, labor, and political organizations; and pharmaceutical and medicine manufacturing. In addition, many professionals with a background in statistics were among the 20,000 full-time mathematics faculty in colleges and universities in 2002, according to the American Mathematical Society. (See the statement on teachers—postsecondary, elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Although more employment opportunities are becoming available to individuals with a bachelor's degree in statistics, a master's degree in statistics or mathematics is usually the mini-



Statisticians work in many different fields, organizing surveys, collecting data, and analyzing the results.

imum educational requirement for most statistician jobs. Research and academic positions in institutions of higher education, for example, require at least a master's degree, and usually a Ph.D., in statistics. Beginning positions in industrial research often require a master's degree combined with several years of experience.

The training required for employment as an entry-level statistician in the Federal Government, however, is a bachelor's degree, including at least 15 semester hours of statistics or a combination of 15 hours of mathematics and statistics, if at least 6 semester hours are in statistics. Qualifying as a mathematical statistician in the Federal Government requires 24 semester hours of mathematics and statistics, with a minimum of 6 semester hours in statistics and 12 semester hours in an area of advanced mathematics, such as calculus, differential equations, or vector analysis.

Many other schools also offered degrees in mathematics, operations research, and other fields that included a sufficient number of courses in statistics to qualify graduates for some beginning positions in the Federal Government. Required subjects for statistics majors include differential and integral calculus, statistical methods, mathematical modeling, and probability theory. Additional courses that undergraduates should take include linear algebra, design and analysis of experiments, applied multivariate analysis, and mathematical statistics.

In 2002, approximately 140 universities offered a master's degree program in statistics or biostatistics, and about 90 offered a doctoral degree program. Many other schools also offered graduate-level courses in applied statistics for students majoring in biology, business, economics, education, engineering, psychology, and other fields. Acceptance into graduate statistics programs does not require an undergraduate degree in statistics, although good training in mathematics is essential.

Because computers are used extensively for statistical applications, a strong background in computer science is highly recommended. For positions involving quality and productivity improvement, training in engineering or physical science is useful. A background in biological, chemical, or health science is important for positions involving the preparation and testing of pharmaceutical or agricultural products. Courses in economics and business administration are helpful for many jobs in market research, business analysis, and forecasting.

Good communications skills are important for prospective statisticians in industry, who often need to explain technical matters to persons without statistical expertise. An understanding of business and the economy also is valuable for those who plan to work in private industry.

Beginning statisticians generally are supervised by an experienced statistician. With experience, they may advance to positions with more technical responsibility and, in some cases, supervisory duties. However, opportunities for promotion are greater for persons with advanced degrees. Master's and Ph.D. degree holders usually enjoy independence in their work and become qualified to engage in research, develop statistical methods, or, after a number of years of experience in a particular area, become statistical consultants.

Job Outlook

Slower than average growth is expected in employment of statisticians over the 2002-12 period. However, job opportunities should remain favorable for individuals with degrees in statistics, although many of these positions will not carry the explicit

job title statistician. This is especially true of jobs that involve the analysis and interpretation of data from other disciplines such as economics, biological science, psychology, or computer software engineering. Despite the limited number of jobs resulting from growth, a number of openings will become available as statisticians transfer to other occupations or retire or leave the work force for other reasons.

Among graduates with a master's degree in statistics, those with a strong background in an allied field, such as finance, biology, engineering, or computer science, should have the best prospects of finding jobs related to their field of study. Federal agencies will hire statisticians in many fields, including demography, agriculture, consumer and producer surveys, Social Security, healthcare, and environmental quality. Competition for entry-level positions in the Federal Government is expected to be strong for persons just meeting the minimum qualification standards for statisticians, because the Federal Government is one of the few employers that considers a bachelor's degree to be an adequate entry-level qualification. Those who meet State certification requirements may become high school statistics teachers. (For additional information, see the statement on teachers—preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Manufacturing firms will hire statisticians with master's and doctoral degrees for quality control of various products, including pharmaceuticals, motor vehicles, aircraft, chemicals, and food. For example, pharmaceutical firms employ statisticians to assess the safety and effectiveness of new drugs. To address global product competition, motor vehicle manufacturers will need statisticians to improve the quality of automobiles, trucks, and their components by developing and testing new designs. Statisticians with knowledge of engineering and the physical sciences will find jobs in research and development, working with teams of scientists and engineers to help improve design and production processes to ensure consistent quality of newly developed products. Many statisticians also will find opportunities developing statistical software for computer software manufacturing firms.

Business firms will rely heavily on workers with a background in statistics to forecast sales, analyze business conditions, and help to solve management problems in order to maximize profits. In addition, consulting firms increasingly will offer sophisticated statistical services to other businesses. Because of the widespread use of computers in this field, statisticians in all industries should have good computer programming skills and knowledge of statistical software.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of statisticians were \$57,080 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$40,510 and \$76,500. The lowest 10 percent had earnings of less than \$30,380, while the highest 10 percent earned more than \$91,680.

The average annual salary for statisticians in the Federal Government in nonsupervisory, supervisory, and managerial positions was \$75,979 in 2003, while mathematical statisticians averaged \$83,472. According to a 2003 survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, starting salary offers for mathematics/statistics graduates with a bachelor's degree averaged \$40,512 a year.

Related Occupations

People in a wide range of occupations work with statistics. Among these are actuaries; mathematicians; operations research analysts; computer systems analysts, database administrators,

and computer scientists; computer programmers; computer software engineers; engineers; economists; market and survey researchers; financial analysts and personal financial advisors; and life, physical, and social scientists.

Sources of Additional Information

For information about career opportunities in statistics, contact:

► American Statistical Association, 1429 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314.

Internet: <http://www.amstat.org>

For more information on doctoral-level careers and training in mathematics, a field closely related to statistics, contact:

► American Mathematical Society, 201 Charles St., Providence, RI 02940.

Internet: <http://www.ams.org>

Information on obtaining a statistician position with the Federal Government is available from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) through a telephone-based system. Consult your telephone directory under U.S. Government for a local number or call (703) 724-1850; Federal Relay Service: (800) 877-8339. The first number is not tollfree, and charges may result. Information also is available from the OPM Internet site: <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov>.