

Jeffrey Hartsell-Gundy

# Finding government statistics on the Internet

A compendium of major sources

**T**he unemployment rate, annual mortality, immigration rates, and annual temperatures are just some of the statistics that are collected by many of the bureaus and agencies of the U.S. government. In many cases the federal government is the only body that has the resources and the authority to collect this kind of data.

For 134 years, the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* was a go-to statistical source for librarians. With last year's cancellation of the *Statistical Abstract* and future federal budget cuts a looming possibility, the availability of statistical resources from the federal government is unclear.

While the *Statistical Abstract* was not a primary source, it provided a useful compilation of sources, especially in the pre-Internet era. Since one of the principal reasons for the cancellation of the *Statistical Abstract* is that "all the information is online now," knowing where to find this information is an important piece of knowledge for librarians.

Fortunately for librarians who do not have access to ProQuest Statistical Insight or other subscription resources, this information is generally available online, albeit spread out across numerous websites and databases. This Internet Resources column is intended to present the major online sources of government statistics.

The U.S. government does not have a centralized statistical reporting agency. There are 13 principal statistical agencies and more than 100 other statistical programs of significant size among executive branch agencies of the U.S. government. These agencies collect information on everything from general characteristics of the population of the United States to the number of specific types of fish commercially harvested each year. Each of the 13 principal agencies has a specific mandate for the information they collect, and the available statistics will generally cover every aspect of that topic.

Agencies will often link to other sources of related data. For instance, the Immigration Statistics page on the Department of Homeland Security website links to related data at the Census Bureau, State Department, and Justice Department. As is the case with print government publications, there is no subject limitation among agencies, so one agency may cover a variety of related topics, or a single topic may be covered by a variety of agencies. Many sites will also have "quick facts" or similar pages, which will

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offer quick access to often sought statistics. The Census Bureau and NCES fast facts pages are particularly useful as these agencies gather information across such a wide variety of topics.

In addition to raw statistical data, most agencies will have sections for publications and reports. These items may collect, summarize, present, and offer analysis and commentary on statistical information and trends. Embracing trends in web development and data visualization, many agencies have also begun to offer statistical data in new forms, such as interactive maps (Census, EPA, USGS, and NOAA), searchable databases (such as the Census Bureau's American FactFinder), and even online tools that allow the building and downloading of custom data sets (such as the NCES Education Data Analysis Tool).

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## **Statistical agencies of the U.S. government**

### **• Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA).**

The Bureau of Economic Analysis collects information on national and international trade, accounts, industry, and economic indicators. BEA maintains a section of its website titled "The U.S. Economy at a Glance," which highlights their most influential economic indicators. Information from the BEA is available by region (state and municipality) and internationally. *Access:* [www.bea.gov](http://www.bea.gov).

### **• Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS).**

As the United States' principal source for criminal justice statistics, BJS collects and publishes statistics on all aspects of criminal justice in the United States at the state, federal, and tribal levels. Crimes by type (violent, property, identify theft, hate crime, etc.) or victim, corrections populations and facilities, and court systems are covered as well as noncriminal aspects of the justice system, including law enforcement personnel and behavior statistics. *Access:* [www.bjs.gov](http://www.bjs.gov).

**• Bureau of Labor Statistics.** Established in 1884, the Bureau of Labor Statistics collects information regarding the U.S. civilian labor force. Figures such as the unemployment rate, Consumer Price Index, Payroll Employment Rate, and Import and Export Price Indexes are all available from the BLS homepage. The BLS website contains more than 500 million individual data points. Raw statistical data is accompanied by publications such as the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* and the *Monthly Labor Review*. *Access:* [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov).

**• Bureau of Transportation Statistics.** Organized under the Department of Transportation, the Bureau of Transportation Statistics collects information about all aspects of travel and transportation in and into the United States: personal travel, public transportation, and even freight. Data available covers air, land, and sea transportation and is available by region, mode of travel, and subject. *Access:* <http://www.rita.dot.gov/bts/>.

**• Census Bureau.** The Census Bureau is most known for collecting information about the population of the United States. The Census Bureau is probably most known for the decennial census of population, but like the other principal statistical agencies the Census Bureau produces a much wider variety of information than just its most known titles. Though it has ceased publication at the Census Bureau, back issues of the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* are available online back to the 1870s. For more current information, the American Community Survey provides annual update information on the American population, and the American FactFinder provides access to the latest decennial census results. The Census Bureau website also provides the Economic Census, information about foreign and domestic trade, and the economy in the United States (the Census Bureau being part of the Commerce Department). Two good places to start investigating census data are the Quick Facts and Easy Stats pages. *Access:* <http://www.census.gov/>.

- **Department of Homeland Security.**

Created in the wake of the September 11 attacks, the Department of Homeland Security has absorbed many federal agencies over the last ten years and now provides information on a variety of topics related to the domestic security of the United States. Statistics on immigration to the United States (most notably the annual *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*), statistics from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and maritime information from the U.S. Coast Guard are all provided through DHS. *Access:* [www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov).

- **Economic Research Service (ERS).**

The second principal statistical agency operated under the USDA, ERS, like the NASS, collects information on agriculture in the United States. However ERS collects data with an eye more toward the economics of agriculture and related fields. Food safety and prices, commodity markets, the rural economy, and agricultural income are covered among other topics. *Access:* <http://www.ers.usda.gov/>.

- **Energy Information Administration (EIA).** Fossil fuels (petroleum, natural gas, coal), nuclear power, and renewable resources make up the energy production portfolio of the United States, and the EIA keeps track of them all from extraction to consumption at the state and national level, as well as international indicators. In addition to sources of energy, EIA tracks energy usage, source stocks, and prices. EIA also provides information on side effects of energy use (emissions and waste) and offers access to industry reporting information. *Access:* [www.eia.gov](http://www.eia.gov).

- **National Agricultural Statistical Service (NASS).** Like other principal statistical reporting agencies, the NASS provides information on every aspect of its area: agriculture. Information about the economics (prices, loans, etc), demographics, commodity stocks and yields, environmental concerns and impacts, land use, and education in agriculture is available in addition to statistics covering crops and livestock. NASS

is also responsible for producing the Census of Agriculture every five years. *Access:* <http://www.nass.usda.gov/>.

- **National Center for Education Statistics.** The National Center for Education Statistics collects information about all aspects of education in the United States from ability and academic English to writing and youth indicators. Statistics are available at the district, municipality, state, and national level covering all ages from children to adult education. NCES has one of the most useful fast facts pages of any principal statistical agency (<https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/>). *Access:* <http://nces.ed.gov/>.

- **National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS).** NCHS, run by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), hosts a large volume of information covering every aspect of health in the United States. More than just information about diseases is available: mortality and natality, exercise, marriage, injury, and access to health care are included. NCHS fast facts page ([www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/)) makes beginning research relatively straight forward. Additionally most NCHS and CDC web pages have access to an A to Z topic list at the top of the page. *Access:* <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/>.

- **National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES).** NCSES provides access to statistical information about science and engineering in the United States. Like other principal statistical agencies, NCSES covers almost every aspect of a very wide topic: education in science and engineering, personnel characteristics, research and development programs, and funding and expenditures. Information is available covering private business and the federal government as well as international statistics. *Access:* [www.nsf.gov/statistics/](http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/).

- **Social Security Administration Office of Research Evaluation and Statistics (ORES).** The Social Security Administration's ORES is probably the most focused of all the principal statistical agencies of the U.S. government, focusing almost solely on the

*(continues on page 152)*

## Enabling Programs and Services

**Goal:** Strategic goal areas will be supported by financial and operational planning, and will guide the development and implementation of programs and services that target education, advocacy, and member engagement.

- Approved a motion stating that section membership levels attained at the close of FY14, i.e., August 2014, be used to budget and allocate section funding for FY15–FY17. This action was taken in anticipation of the fiscal impact of removing additional dues charges for more than three sections or interest group affiliations. (Note: Beginning in September 2014, ALA’s e-commerce system will no longer support the collection of additional fees for sections so ACRL members may select an unlimited number of sections and interest groups.)

- Confirmed the previous virtual votes to: approve the minutes from the Annual Conference 2013; approve a fundraising goal of \$50,000 for the 75th Anniversary Campaign; revise the ACRL Plan for Excellence; withdraw the 2017 Conference from Nashville; approve either Baltimore or Charlotte as the ACRL 2017 conference site; affirm the Guideline for Collective Bargaining, [www.ala.org/acrl/standards/guidelinecollective](http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/guidelinecollective); establish a Task Force to review the Guidelines for the Screening and Appointment of Academic Librarians Using a Search Committee. *ZZ*

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topic of the U.S. Social Security programs. If you are looking for information about Social Security, ORES should be your first destination. *Access:* <http://www.ssa.gov/policy/about/ORES.html>.

- **Statistical Programs of the United States of America.** Published by the Office of Management and Budget, *Statistical Programs of the United States Government* is an annual publication listing the 13 principal statistical agency programs of the United States and the nearly 100 smaller programs run as part of various federal agencies. *Statistical Programs of the United States* provides a topical listing of programs as well as a breakdown of programs by top level federal agencies. With more than 100 programs listed, if a principal statistical agency does not have the information you are looking for, chances are one of the more specialized programs listed here will. While not every federal

agency is responsible for a principal statistical agency, just about every federal agency runs some manner of statistical program, and generally more than just one. These bureaus, programs, departments, and agencies generally focus on narrow topics related in some way to the agencies they are a part of. *Access:* [http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/inforeg\\_statpolicy](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/inforeg_statpolicy).

- **Statistics of Income (SoI).** The Internal Revenue Service provides SoI related to all aspects of federal taxation in the United States. While the SoI is another agency that is fairly focused in the topic it covers, it does manage to provide information on just about every aspect of taxation. Statistics cover individual and business taxes by type and topic, statistics by tax form, information on income, IRS operations, and tax exemptions. *Access:* <http://www.irs.gov/uac/Tax-Stats-2>. *ZZ*