

A Conversation with Margaret Martin

Miron Straf, with Ingram Olkin in attendance

Abstract. Margaret E. Martin was born in 1912 in New York City, New York. She grew up in Yonkers, New York. She received a B.A. degree in economics from Barnard College in 1933, Phi Beta Kappa, and an M.A. from Columbia in the same field the following year. She spent a year as research assistant in the Department of Economics at Iowa State College and two years as research fellow at Smith College. In 1938, she joined the New York State Division of Placement and Unemployment Insurance as a junior economist in the office of research and statistics. In 1942 she received her Ph.D. from Columbia University in economics. The following year, she moved to the U.S. Bureau of the Budget's Division of Statistical Standards where she remained for the next 30 years, retiring as an assistant chief of the Statistical Policy Division in charge of the labor and income statistics fields. During 1962, she worked part-time as Executive Secretary for the President's Committee to Appraise Employment and Unemployment Statistics. She received the Director's Exceptional Service Award, Bureau of the Budget in 1968 for her efforts. Immediately following her retirement from government service, she became Executive Director for the Committee on National Statistics of the National Academy of Sciences' National Research Council. She retired as Director in 1978 but has since continued working with the Committee in various capacities. She was President of the American Statistical Association (ASA) in 1980 and received its Founders Award in 1989, the first year the award was given. She is an elected member of the International Statistical Institute and an honorary life-time member on the board of the Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics. She was chairman of Section U (statistics) of the AAAS in 1986.

The following conversation took place in Atlanta at the annual meeting of the American Statistical Association in August, 1991.

Straf: I thought that we should start with some history, asking you to recount some of your early professional life. Can you remember how many American Statistical Association (ASA) meetings you have attended?

Martin: No, but I attended most of them since I joined the ASA in about '43. I was a staff member at the Bureau of the Budget then, and there was a great deal of pressure on the staff to join

professional associations in the area in which we were working. This was one way of becoming better acquainted with the needs for statistics and what statistical changes and improvements needed to be made and the opportunity to make some contacts with academic people. We didn't have many chances for such contacts in those days. There were much fewer advisory committees, for example. When we had an advisory committee, it was generally thought of as a federal interagency committee.

EARLY DAYS

Straf: Tell us about your early life. What brought you into statistics, and how did you get interested in it? Was it through economics, or another path, that led to your career?

Martin: I started out in a girl's high school being very much interested in mathematics. I had a rather unusual set of math courses. We had math

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