

Discussion: Celebrating the 50-Year History of the Caucus for Women in Statistics

Amanda L. Golbeck

Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health
University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences
4301 West Markham, #820
Little Rock, AR 72205

Abstract

This year the Caucus for Women in Statistics is celebrating its 50th anniversary. My remarks are a supplement to my article: Golbeck AL. 2020. Supporting an inclusive community: A caucus for women in statistics. *Significance Magazine*, April 2020:42-44.

Key Words: History of science, role models, diversity, leadership, gender equity

1. Introduction

I was the president of the Caucus in 2011. I had the pleasure of leading the planning for the 40th Anniversary celebration. It is a special pleasure for me to be involved again, in this 50th Anniversary celebration.

I want to tip my hat to all of the people who have supported the work of the Caucus over these past 50 years. And all of the men and women who have supported the advancement of the status of women in our profession.

In June, I attended a relatively new Caucus event. It is called the Madam President Happy Hour. The Caucus is doing these happy hours every month, via Zoom. Each is hosted by two past presidents. I had a good time connecting with Caucus members. I also got some useful information about a conference that I would like to attend. Like Arlene Ash described in her talk, by connecting with the Caucus, I learned something valuable to me!

At that particular happy hour, the 1992 Caucus President Stephanie Shipp graciously suggested everyone read an article that I wrote about the history of the Caucus. It was published recently, in the March 2020 issue of *Significance Magazine* (Golbeck AL. 2020a.) The talks given today are a great supplement to my article. They add additional details and personal elements to the Caucus story. Many thanks to our three speakers – Donna Brogan, Arlene Ash, and Elizabeth Margosches - for their informative presentations!

2. Great Role Models

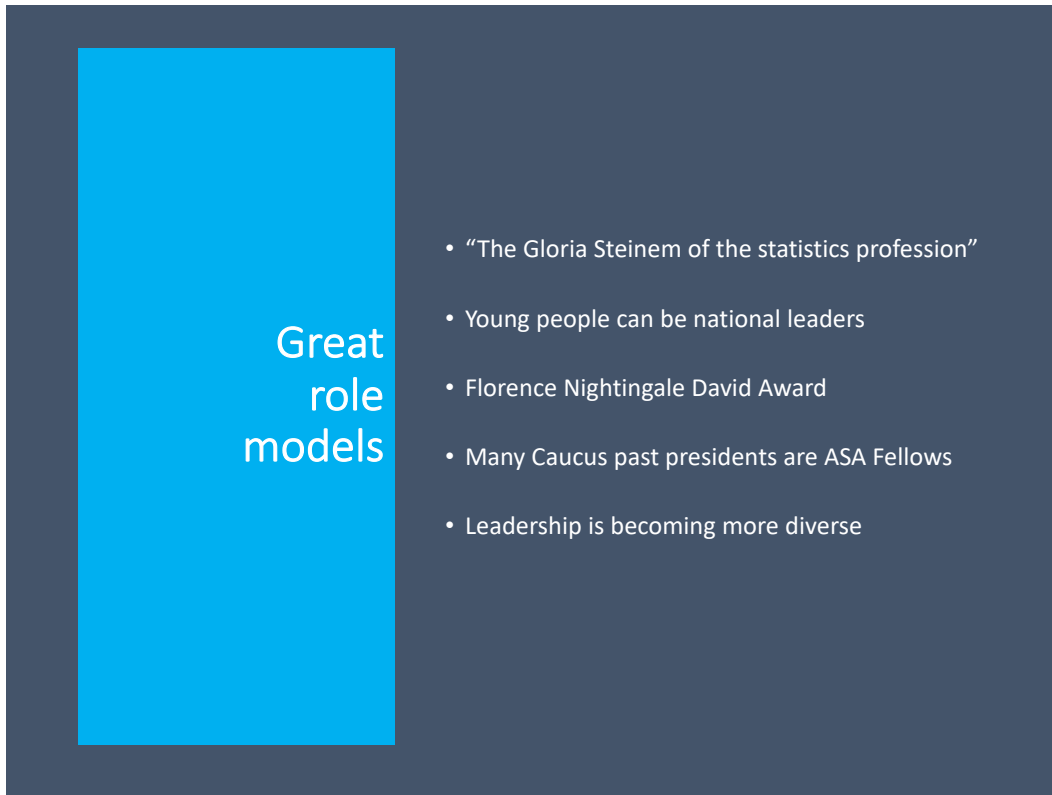


Figure 1: Great Role Models

Also at the happy hour, Stephanie referred to Donna Brogan as the Gloria Steinem of the statistics profession. I think that’s a really nice tribute to Donna for the important role she has played in our profession as a feminist organizer. We thank you, Donna!

In fact, one of the things that the Caucus has always done well is to provide great role models for women in statistics. This started way back with Donna.

Listening to Donna’s talk, I was impressed at how young she was when she became a national leader. She was only 30 years old and had only two years of experience as a faculty member. I’m glad she pointed this out to us. Donna’s example should impress young people that they too can be national leaders in promoting the advancement of women in statistics.

Also, F. N. David and Betty Scott continue to be great role models. And the Caucus is the reason that we have a COPSS Florence Nightingale David Award.

Donna mentions her early vision that Caucus presidents be well-known and well-regarded in statistics. She tells us that the next four presidents after her were all ASA Fellows. In fact, over the past five decades, many of the Caucus presidents have been ASA Fellows. And the Caucus leadership is becoming more diverse.

3. Leadership

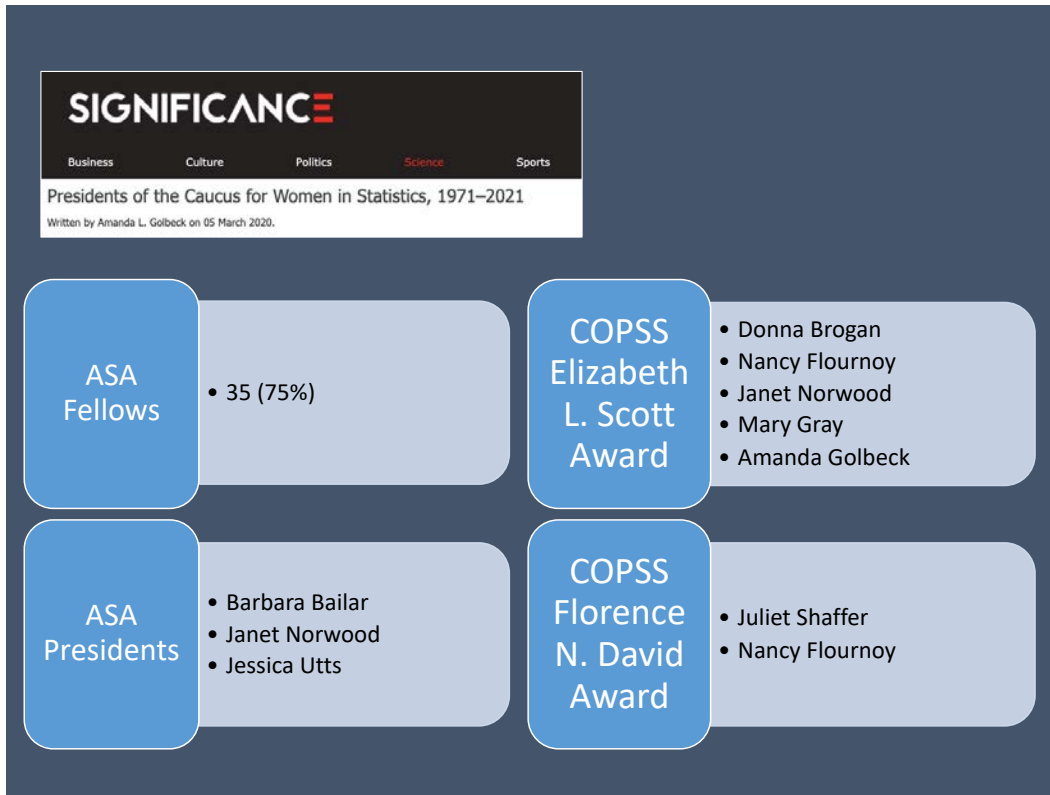


Figure 2: Women leaders

If you want to learn more about the prior presidents of the Caucus, you can go to the *Significance Magazine* web site. There, in celebration of the Caucus' 50th anniversary, you will find all of the Fellow citations for the prior presidents. (Golbeck AL. 2020b.) By my latest calculation, 75%, of prior Caucus presidents have been designated as Fellows. That's an impressive percentage. Also, three Caucus presidents have been ASA presidents, five have received the COPSS Elizabeth L. Scott Award, and two have received the COPSS Florence N. David Award. And Caucus presidents have been leaders in many ways not mentioned here.

When I was the Caucus president, I decided to make a poster of the pictures of the presidents. I remember that Elizabeth Margosches helped me with some of the hardest-to-find pictures. Since then, the Caucus has added pictures of every new president to the poster. The poster is available on the Caucus web site (Caucus for Women in Statistics, 2021).

The pictures make it clear that the Caucus was an organization whose leadership wasn't very diverse, until relatively recently. Along with the increasing number of women statisticians that Elizabeth talks about, there has been an increasing number of women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. The Caucus leadership now reflects this. Notice that we are only missing the pictures of two prior presidents. If you have pictures of Marie Wann or Beatrice Vacarra, we would be grateful if you would please send them to us.

4. Effective operations



Figure 3: Effective operations

Between the three speakers today, a lot has been said about the scientific sessions organized by the Caucus as part of its educational mission, so I won't say more about this. Except that I personally wish it would be easier to get nontechnical, professional development sessions onto the annual JSM program.

Elizabeth mentioned the 501(c)(3) status that the Caucus attained. This means that the Caucus qualifies as a public charity and is eligible to be exempt from paying certain kinds of taxes. People can donate to the Caucus and claim their donations on their taxes.

The Caucus has had a number of web sites over the years. I think the one that it has now is really good. I like the simple functionality and navigation, the well-constructed and attractive pages, the ease of use, and the fresh content. I think it is inviting.

The Caucus has a number of committees, which indicates to me that it is doing a good job organizing its members into teams according to their interests. There is a program committee, a communications committee, a professional development committee, a 'liaisons to other organizations' committee, a country representatives committee, a promoting positive professional environments committee, a travel award committee, a nomination committee, and a Caucus 50th Anniversary Committee. The committees are a road map for what the Caucus is doing these days, and it is clearly has a lot on its plate.

When the Caucus began, it adopted the model of the ASA, where the president serves just one year. One of the things that I talked to my predecessor, Jennifer Parker, about when I

was president of the Caucus was how limiting it could be to lead an organization for just one year.

The Caucus has now found a solution for this problem by having an Executive Director. This is Jessica Kohlschmidt, who previously served as the Caucus secretary. She was appointed as the founding executive director in 2018. Her historical memory and second nature of doing things that need to be taken care of is what inspired the presidents to appoint her to the role. She is now starting a second three-year term. She is providing the continuity that you can't get with a sequence of one-year presidents. And the establishment of this position was a sign of maturity of the organization.

5. More to do



Figure 4: More to do

Donna mentioned the “Help Wanted Male” and “Help Wanted Female” job advertisements. Some thought getting rid of gendered classified ads would put more women into the pipeline for better jobs. But sadly, this hasn't happened. I chair the national Joint Data Committee, which oversees the surveys of mathematical sciences departments across the country. I looked at the latest data, which are from 2018. In our doctoral granting departments of statistics and biostatistics, still only 23% of our full professors are women, and only 20% of the department chairs are women.

Donna tells us that, when she started the Caucus, she thought that sex discrimination in statistics would disappear in the not-too-distant future. That was in 1971. It reminds me of the questionnaire that Betty Scott at Berkeley completed in 1973. She was asked to give a

projected date for the completion of her research on academic women. She said, “Seems unlikely to be completed during my lifetime.” Betty died in 1988.

Donna describes the first time she realized that her own experiences with sex discrimination were not unique. Around the same time, Betty Scott said this: “...it is not often that one can point to something as surely discrimination – usually we cannot distinguish between the consequences of our own lack of ability and those of an unfair authority.” (Golbeck, AL. 2017.) The Caucus provides a forum for the sharing of our stories. It provides a way for us to process such a realization.

Donna reminds us that in the first decades of the Caucus, we didn’t have all of the tools that we have now. The Caucus has done a great job in recent years with developing an Internet presence with innovative programming. There are Zoom events, webinars, web-posted interviews, opportunities to engage on social media, conference events, opportunities to give either to the Caucus general fund or to various initiative funds, on-the-go mentoring sessions, and web links to tons of professional development resources.

I wrote in my paper on the history of the Caucus, that: Following on from the successes and drive of its earlier decades, in the late 2000s the Caucus found itself somewhat unsure of its purpose and where it should go next. My personal experience with the Caucus began around that time. Caucus leaders were questioning its mission: was it a social group, an advocacy group, or something else?

I wanted to help lead the Caucus towards a clarity of mission, and back to its advocacy roots, so I took the idea of a conference about women's issues to the Caucus and the ASA Committee on Women. I spent much of my year as Caucus president developing the idea of such a conference. Later, others carried on with the work of the conference, and it morphed into the ASA Women in Statistics and Data Science Conference. The Caucus provides important leadership to this conference each year.

You can help preserve the history! Today, Elizabeth has taken a great opportunity to ask you for help in identifying people in her collection of photographs at Caucus meetings. I recognize Juliet Shaffer. I hope you will help identify other people in the photographs. Also, Arlene has asked you to please send any historical documents you can find about the caucus. I suggest you send everything to Jessica Kohlschmidt, the Caucus Executive Director.

6. What is a Caucus?

If you Google “Caucus for women”, what comes up first is the “Congressional Caucus for Women’s Issues”. What comes up next is “The Women’s Caucus of the Women’s Congressional Policy Institute”. Then you see some entries that take you to information about our Caucus for Women in Statistics.

Coming up next on Google are many more entries about various women’s legislative Caucuses. So, it’s no wonder that most people associate Caucuses as being in the legislative realm. What makes our Caucus similar to the legislative Caucuses is that all were set up in order to do advocacy work.

Some professional associations have these kinds of groups, but they are more often called committees or interest groups. Statistics associations also have these kinds of groups,

where the group is part of, or managed under the umbrella of, the association. The International Statistical Institute even calls their group, of which I am a member, the Management Committee on Women.

There is also the American Statistical Association's Committee on Women, the Statistical Society of Canada's Women in Statistics Committee, the Royal Statistical Society's Special Interest Group for Women in Data Science and Statistics, and the Croatian Statistical Society's Section on Women in Statistics.

7. What is the relationship between the Caucus and the ASA Committee on Women?

Our Caucus for Women in Statistics is unlike any of these groups on women in that it is not part of – or managed by - any statistics professional association. The Caucus is often confused with the ASA Committee on Women because both have a presence at the JSM, and the two groups have worked some important initiatives together. But the Caucus is completely independent of the ASA and any other statistics association.



Figure 5: Regeneration and potential

This brings me to a point that I would like to highlight. Way back in 1971, statistics women set up two groups, not one. They set up a Caucus for Women in Statistics, and they set up an ASA Committee on Women. The Committee is attached to the American Statistical

Association. The Caucus is independent. In my opinion, setting up these two groups was a smart thing to do.

I learned a number of new things from Donna’s talk. One is that: it was the Caucus which proposed to the ASA Council that they form the ASA Committee on Women. And that the Caucus was influential in selecting seven of the eight members of the committee.

The 16-member Committee on Women that is attached to the ASA can work on the inside. It can work through normal association channels to make positive change happen for ASA women members.

8. What is the relationship between the Caucus and the Associations?

The 300-member Caucus that is independent of all of our other statistics associations can work on the outside. It can lead initiatives that extend across statistical associations. It can partner on initiatives led by the “inside” committees. It can reinforce what the “inside” committees are doing.

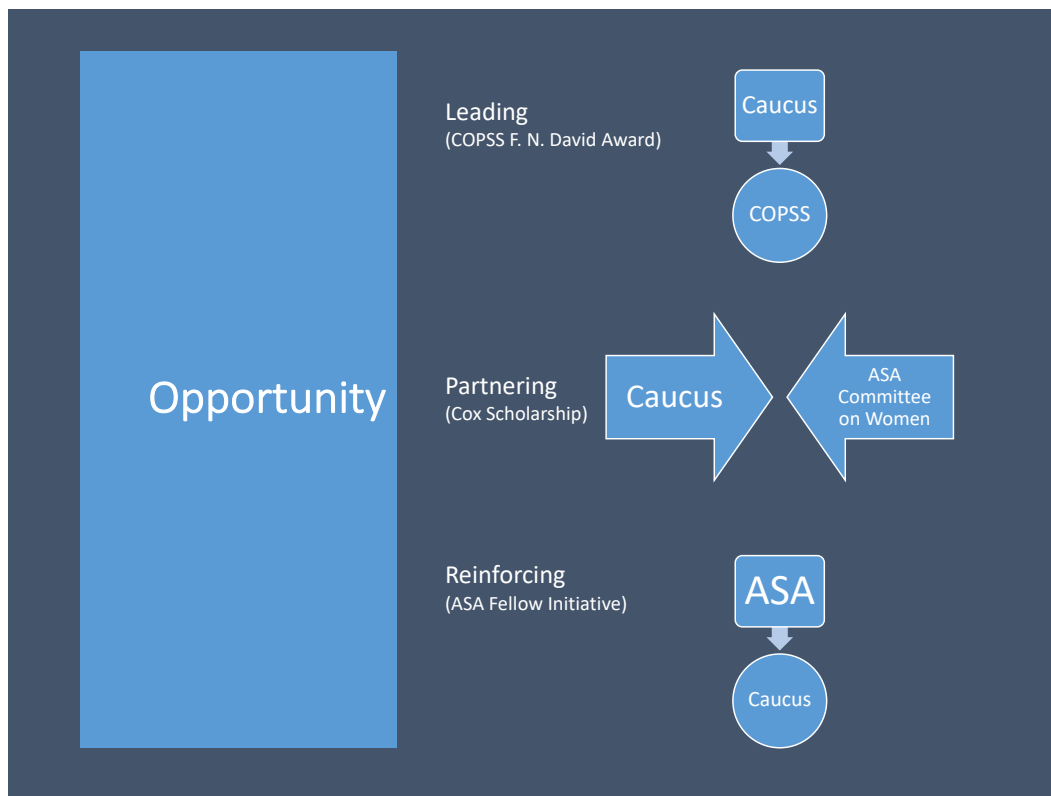


Figure 6: Opportunity

The Caucus leads advocacy initiatives across professional associations. Elizabeth mentions a number of examples. Two that are still going strong are the COPSS Florence Nightingale David Award, and the reception at the JSM for first-time attendees.

It partners with the ASA Committee to offer the Gertrude M. Cox Scholarship, which Arlene mentioned as an accomplishment of the 1980’s. The Caucus continues to help select

the scholarship winner or winners, and for many years it raised funds for the scholarship via the Gertrude Cox Scholarship Run.

The Caucus reinforces the initiative of the ASA Committee to increase the proportion of ASA Fellows who are women. As Arlene mentioned, nominating women for ASA fellows and other awards and honors is important to give women the recognition they deserve. As Elizabeth mentioned, the Caucus has set up committees to help identify nominees.

9. Conclusions

The Caucus has worked with the ASA Committee on Women since day one. In recent years, the Caucus has reached out to, and formed relationships with, other statistics associations, with and without their own committees on women. In fact, the Caucus now has a designated liaison to a number of statistics associations in addition to the ASA. I will underline Arlene's point that: "CWS is a safe space to speak out and be women, but not be entirely separate from the rest of the professional community."

One of the things that many statistics women understood early on is that to advance women, they needed to have help from the men, as they were in power. So, I will end by repeating Arlene's wise observation: "CWS must continue to help us address questions of particular interest to women while welcoming their partners and all fellow-travelers who support our goals."

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the leadership of the Caucus for Women in Statistics for inviting me to be the discussant at this celebratory session.

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