

A Brief History of the ACS Comprehensive Salary and Employment Status Survey

1942 Origins

When the “Survey of the Chemical Profession” was introduced in 1941 by the Committee on Economic Status, its purpose was to collect comprehensive data on the economic status of the chemical profession. Believing economic status included more than income, other aspects of the occupational environment were included as well. The entire ACS membership was polled and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) both collected and helped analyze the data.

1943 Professional Workers in War and Peace

Even while the world was at war, the ACS distributed the salary survey in a joint effort with the BLS. Questions relating to the age, gender, education level, as well as war time status were added.

1955 A Time of Change

In the decade following WW2, extreme change occurred in the job market for Chemists. Therefore a decision was made to not undertake the survey because the slow nature of the printing process could not keep up with changes in data. However, in 1952 it was decided by the Committee on Professional Relations and Status to restart the survey, this time focusing on starting salaries and only polling a sample of the membership.

In 1954, a resolution was passed to conduct a comprehensive survey of the entire membership for current salaries. Again the BLS facilitated in the running of tables and in the design of the questionnaire. C&EN also started running the results of the survey for the first time.

The 1960's Help from the NSF

The survey was conducted in 1960 was a joint effort with the National Science Foundation in order to update the National Register of Scientific and Technical Personnel. The entire ACS membership was surveyed and the BLS was no longer a partner in the tabulations or analysis. A problem arose on how to handle the responses of chemical engineers and females who were too small a population to sample accurately. Throughout the 1960s, the salary survey was mailed out every two years, in correlation with the NSF Register.

The early 1970s New Procedures

In the 1970s, the survey began to be produced yearly by the Office of Professional Relations. A sample of the ACS population was used instead of the complete membership. The 1970s also saw the survey come back under the direction of the Committee on Economic Status from the Committee of Professional Relations and Status. In conjunction with the American Institute of Chemical Engineers, the ACS attempted to solve its dilemma of handling the replies of chemical engineers. The issue remained on the number of female responses being so small as to make the sample statistically invalid.

In 1973 the employment and salary surveys were combined and thereafter polled together. A question on minority status was also added for the first time.

1975 One Problem Solved

In 1975 it was resolved to survey all female members of the ACS population in order to obtain enough replies to make the results statistically valid. After the responses came back to the ACS, 25% of the female replies were used for analysis. However, beginning in 1975, a separate report was published every fifth year using all the female responses in order to track their salaries and employment titled "Women Chemists."

1985 Rating Satisfaction

In 1985 a category was added to cover supplemental income as well as questions on overall satisfaction of the position held. The new questions included assessing chances for professional advancement, overall satisfaction with the job, perceived fairness, and job security. These questions were asked again in 1990 and 1995. Full ACS membership was polled for this survey.

1990 Getting Personal

1990 saw the addition of a section entitled “Questions About Yourself.” In the rough stages, they encompassed inquiries on physical disabilities and number of dependent children. These questions were refined in later years and also included in the 1995 survey.

The 1990s Business as Usual

The Committee on Economic Status gave way to the Committee on Economic and Professional Affairs in 1994. In 1995 a full survey of all ACS members was done in keeping with surveying the entire population every fifth year and taking samples in the interim. “Women Chemists” was produced in 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, and 1995 and included the respondents from the entire female ACS population.

2000--Looking Ahead

The Committee on Economic and Professional Affairs has an opportunity, at the brink of a new millennium, to set the standard for future surveys. The ChemCensus 2000 was sent to more than 94,000 “working” ACS members. The rapid changes in employers of chemists, new practices of chemistry, along with new methods of compensation for chemists led to new refinements in the survey –both with salary measures and employment status measures-- as we enter the new era of professional chemical employment.