

Newsweek Science Columnist Sharon Begley Selected as Winner of ASA Excellence in Statistical Reporting Award

Award will be presented at Joint Statistical Meetings in Washington DC; three conference sessions feature previous ESRA winners and other media representatives

ALEXANDRIA VA (PRWEB) JUNE 16, 2009 – Sharon Begley, *Newsweek* science columnist, has been named the recipient of the 2009 Excellence in Statistical Reporting Award (ESRA) of the American Statistical Association (ASA). The award was announced today by ASA and will be presented to Begley at the Joint Statistical Meetings (JSM) in Washington DC August 4th.

“Begley was selected on the basis of her whole body of work, especially for ‘detangling numbers, probabilities, and statistics to enable public understanding of current science issues,’” said Telba Irony, chair of ASA’s Committee on Excellence in Statistical Reporting. “Begley is widely known for her ability to translate complex scientific theories into understandable prose and writes a bi-weekly column, essays and cover stories for *Newsweek*.”

Begley also wrote a *Wall Street Journal* column – Science Journal -- for five years. Begley is the recipient of many awards, including the Public Understanding of Science Award from the Exploratorium, the science museum in San Francisco and a Clarion Award from the Association for Women in Communications for her "Science Journal" column. She is the co-author of the 2002 book, “The Mind and the Brain,” and the author of the 2007 book “Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain.”

The ESRA was created to encourage and recognize members of the communications media who have best displayed an informed interest in the science of statistics and its role in public life. The award can be given for a single statistical article or for a body of work. In selecting the recipient, consideration is given to:

- Correctness, clarity, fairness, brevity, and professionalism of the communication
- Importance, relevance and overall effectiveness in impacting the intended audience
- Impact on the growth and national or regional exposure of statistics
- Appreciation and emphasis of the statistical aspects of a particular issue or event
- Excellent coverage of research on statistics or statistical issues

Statistics and the Media

Begley will be one of four panelists discussing how statisticians can best respond to media questions and how they can help the media understand how statisticians need the questions framed. The invited session, titled “Statistics and the Media: Getting the Questions and Answers Right, also features as panelists Carl Bialik, the “Numbers Guy” from the *Wall Street Journal* and the 2007 ESRA recipient; Keith Winstein, a 2009 ESRA finalist; and Tom Siegfried, editor-in-chief of *Science News*. The session is scheduled for Tuesday at 8:30 am and is sponsored by the ASA Scientific and Public Affairs Advisory Committee.

A second statistics and media invited session on Tuesday at 10:30 is sponsored by Irony’s committee. Titled “Communicating Statistical Concepts to a Lay Audience,” the session features presentations by three previous ESRA winners: John Berry, Bloomberg News, 2005; Gina Kolata, *New York Times*, 2004; and Mark Buchanan, independent science writer, 2008.

On Tuesday at 2 pm, a third invited session, “Mediating Statistics in the Media: Getting Your Numbers Rightly Reported,” will feature the following panelists: David Leonhardt, *New York Times*; Shankar Vedantam, *The Washington Post*; and William Alpert, *Barron’s*. The session sponsor is the ASA Committee on Meetings.

About JSM

JSM, the world's largest annual gathering of statisticians, is held jointly with the American Statistical Association (ASA), the International Biometric Society (ENAR and WNAR), the Institute of Mathematical Statistics (IMS), and the Statistical Society of Canada (SSC). The theme for this year's conference is *Communicating Statistics: Speaking Out and Reaching Out*. A brief history of the JSM can be found at <http://www.amstat.org/meetings/jsm/2009/index.cfm>

About the American Statistical Association

The American Statistical Association (ASA), a scientific and educational society founded in Boston in 1839, is the second oldest continuously operating professional society in the United States. For 170 years, ASA has been providing its 18,000 members serving in academia, government, and industry and the public with up-to-date, useful information about statistics. The ASA has a proud tradition of service to statisticians, quantitative scientists, and users of statistics across a wealth of academic areas and applications. For additional information about the American Statistical Association, please visit the association's web site at <http://www.amstat.org> or call 703.684.1221.

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