



University of Pennsylvania
ScholarlyCommons

Statistics Papers

Wharton Faculty Research

1-2016


Reflections on the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Monthly Labor Review

Lawrence D. Brown
University of Pennsylvania

Lisa M. Lynch

Constance F. Citro

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.upenn.edu/statistics_papers

 Part of the [Labor Relations Commons](#), [Politics and Social Change Commons](#), [Public Affairs Commons](#), [Public Policy Commons](#), [Publishing Commons](#), [Social Policy Commons](#), [Social Statistics Commons](#), [Statistics and Probability Commons](#), and the [Work, Economy and Organizations Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brown, L. D., Lynch, L. M., & Citro, C. F. (2016). Reflections on the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Monthly Labor Review. *Monthly Labor Review*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.21916/mlr.2016.3>

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. https://repository.upenn.edu/statistics_papers/661
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.

Reflections on the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Monthly Labor Review

Abstract

It is an honor to comment on directions for the Monthly Labor Review MLR over its next 25 years. The MLR is the federal government's oldest continuous publication—first printed in 1915 and now published online by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), one of the nation's oldest statistical agencies, established in 1884. BLS embodies the standards articulated by the Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT) in the fifth edition of its quadrennial volume *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency* (National Research Council, 2013). P&P lays down four principles: that a statistical agency produce data relevant to policy issues, earn credibility with data users, earn the trust of data providers (e.g., households, businesses), and maintain independence from political and other undue external influence.

Disciplines

Business | Labor Relations | Politics and Social Change | Public Affairs | Public Policy | Publishing | Social Policy | Social Statistics | Statistics and Probability | Work, Economy and Organizations



ARTICLE

JANUARY 2016

Reflections on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Monthly Labor Review

Editor's note: This essay is part of a series being published to help commemorate the Monthly Labor Review's centennial (July 1915–July 2015). The essays—written by eminent authorities and distinguished experts in a broad range of fields—cover a variety of topics pertinent to the Review and the work of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Each essay is unique and comprises the words and opinion of the author. We've found these essays to be enlightening and inspirational. We hope you do as well.

It is an honor to comment on directions for the Monthly Labor Review MLR over its next 25 years. The MLR is the federal government's oldest continuous publication—first printed in 1915 and now published online by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), one of the nation's oldest statistical agencies, established in 1884. BLS embodies the standards articulated by the Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT) in the fifth edition of its quadrennial volume Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency (National Research Council, 2013). P&P lays down four principles: that a statistical agency produce data relevant to policy issues, earn credibility with data users, earn the trust of data providers (e.g., households, businesses), and maintain independence from political and other undue external influence. P&P also offers 13 practices, such as the continual development of more useful data, openness about data sources and limitations, wide dissemination of data, an active research program, and collaboration with other statistical agencies. The MLR exemplifies many of these practices and thereby helps BLS achieve the principles we believe are critical to the success of a federal statistical agency. Not only does the MLR serve as an accessible outlet for authoritative labor statistics, but it also publishes original articles that cover substantive issues related to the state of the labor force and methodological developments, all the while maintaining objectivity and policy neutrality. A quick review of recent tables of contents reveals that the MLR editors look far and wide in their search for relevant articles. That editorial policy epitomizes best practice for a statistical agency and helps explain the wide appeal of this publication.

In thinking about the future scope of the MLR, it makes sense to look back at the climate in which BLS was founded. Agitation for a federal statistical agency began as early as the 1860s and gathered steam with the formation of organized labor groups such as the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor. Finally, in 1884, overwhelming majorities in both houses of Congress approved a bill to establish the Bureau of Labor [Statistics]. One representative declared, "A great deal of public attention in and out of Congress has been given to the American hog and the American steer. I submit, Mr. Chairman, that it is time to give more attention to the American man [and woman]" (Ewan Clague, quoted in Joseph P. Goldberg and William T. Moye, [The First Hundred Years of the Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), Bulletin 2235 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 1985), p. 3.

BLS was charged to produce statistics on conditions, broadly defined, of the American worker in an era of rapid industrialization. Topics of early BLS study included hours and wages of men and women workers, child labor, effects of immigration in labor markets, labor force conditions for minorities, household living standards, prices and the cost of living, and strikes, lockouts, and other aspects of industrial relations.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lawrence D. Brown

Lawrence D. Brown is chair of the Committee on National Statistics and Professor of Statistics at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania.

Lisa M. Lynch

Lisa M. Lynch is a member of the Committee on National Statistics and Professor of Social and Economic Policy, Brandeis University.

Constance F. Citro

Constance F. Citro is director of the Committee on National Statistics at the National Academy of Sciences.

RELATED CONTENT

Related Articles

[The Monthly Labor Review turns 100, Monthly Labor Review, July 2015.](#)

Related Subjects

Bureau of labor statistics
History

Article PDF

[Download article PDF version](#)

[Back to Top](#)

In the future, the editors of the MLR will need to keep in mind the reason there is a BLS: to report on the conditions of American workers and American households, disaggregated by geographic area and such demographic characteristics as gender, age, ethnicity, race, and more. Analogous to concerns articulated 100 years ago are those voiced today about the adequacy of wages and benefits, the growth of inequality, and work schedules that do or do not accommodate family or personal needs. The effects of immigration and the cost of living are also as much a focus of attention today as they were 100 years ago.

Although topics of interest may resemble those of the past, the challenge for the MLR editors is to keep up to date with nuances of emerging issues—for example, implications for workers of the meteoric rise of sharing businesses, such as Uber and Airbnb. Regular perusal of social media may give the editors valuable signals about developments that require added or modified data—from BLS’s own programs or those of other agencies, the private sector, or academia, with which BLS might usefully partner. Similarly, the MLR editors need to keep abreast of societal changes with data quality implications, such as declining survey response rates and the increasing availability of data streams from other sources, to make sure that the pages of this designed-to-be-informative journal alert readers to both the changes and their effects. In these ways, the MLR can continue not only to serve its primary function of informing the nation about labor conditions, but also to help BLS identify areas of needed data improvement in order to fulfill its mission of reporting on the economic status of the American worker and household.

SUGGESTED CITATION:

Lawrence D. Brown, Lisa M. Lynch, and Constance F. Citro, "Reflections on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Monthly Labor Review," *Monthly Labor Review*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 2016, <https://doi.org/10.21916/mlr.2016.3>.

RECOMMEND THIS PAGE USING:  Facebook  Twitter  LinkedIn

TOOLS

Areas at a Glance
Industries at a Glance
Economic Releases
Databases & Tables
Maps

CALCULATORS

Inflation
Injury And Illness

HELP

Help & Tutorials
FAQs
Glossary
About BLS
Contact Us

INFO

What's New
Careers @ BLS
Find It! DOL
Join our Mailing Lists
Linking & Copyright Info

RESOURCES

Inspector General (OIG)
Budget and Performance
No Fear Act
USA.gov
Benefits.gov

[Freedom of Information Act](#) | [Privacy & Security Statement](#) | [Disclaimers](#) | [Customer Survey](#) | [Important Web Site Notices](#)

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics | Division of Information and Marketing Services, PSB Suite 2850, 2 Massachusetts Avenue, NE Washington, DC 20212-0001
www.bls.gov/OPUB | Telephone: 1-202-691-5200 | [Contact Us](#)