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The history of StataQuest

J. Theodore Anagnoson

In the mid- to late 1980s, Rich DeLeon of San Francisco State and I, both Stata users at the time, had become interested in exploratory data analysis. Stata was one of the few programs where you could “explore” with graphs, i.e., make small changes to a command, see the resulting graphs, and repeat. We had both switched from using SPSS and SAS to Stata because Stata was so much faster and more interactive and had vastly superior analytical graphs. About 1990, we used Stata in a California State University-sponsored and funded faculty workshop on exploratory data analysis, held at CSU Fullerton, which had both an available microcomputer lab and a hotel on campus. We subsequently had two grants from the National Science Foundation to conduct exploratory data analysis workshops with Stata in the early 1990s; these were held at San Francisco State University. We had faculty from all over the United States attend the NSF-funded workshops, more than 80 from all kinds of colleges.

At the same time, Stan Loll, the statistical computing editor of Wadsworth/Duxbury, visited our campus to discuss current developments in statistics and computing, and I told him about the workshops and about Stata. (Bill Gould had spoken at the workshops at our invitation; I urged Stan to talk to Bill about Stata.) Ultimately this developed into StataQuest, the “student” statistical package that Wadsworth bought from Computing Research Center (CRC) and for which Rich and I wrote the user manual. StataQuest has been through three editions; at one point we had both a long book of over 300 pages and a shorter one intended to be bundled with Wadsworth statistics books, and each of these had a Windows, a MacIntosh, and a DOS version, making six flavors in all.

We had a joint meeting in the early 1990s at CRC offices, then located in Santa Monica, a short drive for me. Bill Rogers had authored the first version of the menu system to be incorporated into the student-oriented package. It wasn't very fast, but it did what we wanted, and eventually, Stata incorporated these menus, amplifying them many times beyond what we had included in StataQuest. The name StataQuest, by the way, came later, suggested by a staff member at Wadsworth in an internal contest. Rich and I came up with most of the ideas in the menus, but Lawrence Hamilton at the University of New Hampshire, another of Stan's authors, suggested that we have a “statistical calculator” in the program to take advantage of the “immediate” commands, which was a big hit from my perspective.

The latest and, I assume, last edition of StataQuest was published by Duxbury in 1996. It's still selling, mostly bundled with Wadsworth/Duxbury statistics books.

1 References

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About the Author

Ted Anagnoson is at the Department of Political Science, California State University, Los Angeles. His interests lie in the politics and financing of health and aging programs, exploratory data analysis, computer applications in the public sector, and American and California politics. He chaired Cal State LA's Academic Senate from 2002 to 2004 and is the campus' 2004–05 President's Distinguished Professor.