

Collecting Statistical Data

Collecting statistical data is a process that can be time consuming and frustrating. The payoff, however, is solid qualitative and/or quantitative data that can be very hard to refute if it comes from a reputable source. This document will outline some strategies that you can employ to locate and manipulate data.

When all else fails, know that you can visit the library's *Information Desk* for assistance in locating statistics.

THINGS TO KNOW

- ~ Statistics do not exist for all things.
- ~ Not all statistics are available on the World Wide Web.
- ~ Statistical data sets can be discontinued at any time by an agency that collects them.
- ~ It can be years after the census is taken that data is released.
- ~ Use reputable sources – Statistics Canada (<http://www.statcan.ca/>) and other government agencies are the best.
- ~ All levels of government (municipal, provincial, and federal) collect statistics.
- ~ Be aware of biases by private organization that post statistical data.
- ~ It is not always free – even from Statistics Canada.

WHERE TO BEGIN

Libraries

Libraries are a good place to begin the research process. Libraries will have a variety of statistical sources that include: almanacs, annual reports, books, periodicals (journals, magazines, and newspapers), government reports, and online databases.

The online databases are of particular use. Through Medicine Hat College Library Services' collection, you will have access to *E-Stat*. *E-Stat* gives students and staff of the college access to publications, customizable tables, and other statistics that are not immediately accessible via Statistics Canada's public interface. Access to *E-Stat* can be found at: <http://www.mhc.ab.ca/library/databases/canadianstudies.html>.

Medicine Hat College Library Services can be found on the Web at: <http://www.mhc.ab.ca/library/>

Local Media/Newspapers

Newspapers can help you in building your research – particularly on the local level. Researchers will sometimes track articles over a period of time as means of collecting/developing correlative and trend data sets. For example: A researcher might notice that more stories are written about food banks during the month of December, so one might postulate that their need is greater during this time. Other local statistics (e.g., crime, homelessness, etc.) might also be published in local newspapers. Additional, other local news agencies (i.e., radio and television stations) might be sources to contact.

Local Social Agencies

Sometimes you might hit the figurative "brick wall" in your research – particularly when you are looking for local statistics. Local social agencies might track some data sets that are not necessarily published via print or electronic mediums. Local social agencies that you can consult include, but are not limited to: Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) or other local police agency, municipal government (city or town halls), non-profit organizations (e.g., local shelters, food banks, youth centers, etc.), business organizations (e.g., Chamber of Commerce), professional organizations (e.g., local chapter of the Alberta Teachers' Association), local museums and archives, and religious institutions, etc.

Businesses

If you need to collect statistical information from sources such as corporations, browse their available public records (e.g., annual reports). If the company is not publically traded (i.e., private), you will have to approach the company directly and request figures. Private companies, however, are not obligated to provide data.

COLLECT, COMPILE, AND INTERPRET YOUR OWN STATISTICS

Sometimes when all other things fail, you will have to collect your own statistics. The library will have many sources available for you to collect, compile, and interpret your data.

If you navigate to our library's online catalogue: <http://darius.uleth.ca/search~S2/>, you can perform a *Basic Keyword* search using the term *statistics*. This simple search will return a number of titles that will give you insights into the process of gathering and interpreting statistics. Some titles that you might employ are:

- ~ *Introductory Statistics* (Call #: QA 276.12 M29 2007)
- ~ *Introduction to Probability and Statistics* (Call #: QA 276 M425 2009)
- ~ *Statistics for Dummies* (Call #: HA 29 R83 2003)
- ~ *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics* (Call #: HA 29 S2365 2007)
- ~ *The Tao of Statistics: A Path to Understanding (with No Math)* (Call #: QA 276 K253 2006)

Additionally, you can use the same *Basic Keyword* search to narrow down your search. If you want to narrow it down to specific geographic regions or subject areas, try using these searches: *statistics and canada*, *statistics and alberta*, *statistics and family*, *statistics and "medicine hat"*, *statistics and crime*, etc. [NOTE: By using AND to connect your terms, you will narrow your search.]

USING THE WEB

The World Wide Web (WWW) is an excellent place to look for statistical data. Do not be misled when you search for statistics on the Web though. If you do locate statistical data, consider the following:

- ~ Is the data verifiable from a reputable source (e.g., Statistics Canada)?
- ~ Is the organization that collected the statistics reputable? [i.e., Search for what groups or organizations (political, religious, etc.) it is affiliated with. This will help you to determine bias.]
- ~ Are the statistics qualitative (non-numeric) or quantitative (numeric)?
- ~ Know that governments and educational institutions are *generally* considered more reliable.

Sites for Collecting Statistics...

Finding Canadian Statistics (<http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/datalib/other/findcans.htm>)

- ~ An excellent site for locating a broad variety of Canadian statistics.

Finding U.S. and International Statistics (<http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/datalib/other/findints.htm>)

- ~ An excellent site for locating a broad variety of statistics about the U.S.A. and international community.

Finding and Using Canadian Statistics (<http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/11-533-XIE/11-533-XIE2005001.htm>)

- ~ A site from Statistics Canada that offers tips and tricks to locating Canadian statistics.

Alberta, Canada: Statistics and Publications (<http://www.albertacanada.com/statpub/>)

- ~ The official home of statistics from the Government of Alberta.

GDSourcing (<http://www.gdsourcing.com/>)

- ~ A great source for locating Canadian business and economic statistics.

Statistics Canada – Finding Statistics (<http://www.brocku.ca/library/guides/stcan.pdf>)

- ~ A simple how-to-guide to introduce users to Statistics Canada.