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Historical Statistics of the United States, Millennial Edition

Janice G. Schuster

▼ ADVISOR REVIEWS—STANDARD REVIEW

Historical Statistics of the United States, Millennial Edition

Date of Review: November 21, 2006

Composite Score: ★★★★   **Reviewed by: Janice G. Schuster**
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Pricing Options

Pricing is for a one-time purchase of the online edition. There is an annual maintenance fee of $100. Access for "precollege" institutions costs $1,500. For public libraries, pricing is based on size of population served, ranging from $1,500 for under 100,000 served to $5,000 for up to 1 million served. For colleges, pricing is based on FTE, including $2,400 for under 5,000 FTE (small); $4,300.00 for 5,000–10,000 FTE (medium); large institutions (10,000+ FTE) need to contact <hsus@cambridge.org> for a price quote. Corporations and government/individuals pay $3,300 and $1,750, respectively, for a single site. The five-volume print set is also available with the online edition; contact <hsus@cambridge.org> for details.

A negative aspect of the pricing structure is that the FTE includes faculty, undergraduate, and graduate students. In my experience, few vendors include all those categories in the FTE count. It is more common to include only FTE students, not faculty. In my library's case, including all of those categories still would keep us in the "small" category, but for other libraries, the addition of the faculty count might increase them unfairly into the "medium" category.

Product Description

The last edition of the Historical Statistics of the United States was published by the Census Bureau in 1975. When the Census Bureau decided, in the early 1990s, that it would not publish a new edition of Historical Statistics, a team of renowned social scientists came together with Cambridge University Press to create a new edition. More than 200 of the nation's leading economists, historians, political scientists, sociologists, and other scholars contributed to the millennial edition of Historical Statistics. This new edition adds thirty years of data and contains coverage of topics that received little or no coverage in the 1975 edition: American Indians, slavery, poverty, race, and ethnicity.

The electronic edition has been designed to give users a variety of means to search and navigate the vast amount of data in the Historical Statistics. Users will be able to graph individual tables or to combine data from different tables into "custom tables" and download tables for use in spreadsheets and other applications.

Critical Evaluation

Search Interface: The database's home page is straightforward, with clear buttons for an introduction to HSUS, table of contents, a tour of the site, and trial request. One oddity of the home page is under "About HSUS." There is no information about the database itself: what it is, what it contains, etc. Instead, the information under that heading includes downloading options and other features of the database. One would expect to find more background information about the database itself on the home page. A button leads to further information, but it seems that the downloading and other details should require a click and a summary of the database should be directly on the home page.

There are clear navigation tabs for Contents, Indexes, Search, and Favorites at the top of the home page screen. The system defaults to showing the entries under the Contents tab. The Indexes tab reveals a searchable A-Z index, browseable index terms, and a box to search each individual section: Part A: Population; Part B: Work and Welfare; Part C: Economic Structure and Performance; Part D: Economic Sectors; and Part E: Governance and International Relations. Clicking on the link to each part reveals a list of the chapters included in that part. The Search tab reveals a general search box, used to search all chapters at once, as well as a search by page number. The Favorites tab shows saved data and includes a link to instructions for saving data.

Searching: The search screen itself is clear, but some of the search instructions are worded unclearly. For example, under the main search box: "Entering two terms will search for both terms, not for either term. To search for one term or the other term, enter an 'or' between the search terms." This might be clear to librarians (although I had to read it a few times before it was clear to me that the first sentence means that there is an understood Boolean AND, and the second sentence means that, to do a Boolean OR search, one must add the OR), but I am sure that my library's patrons will not know what it means. Another example of a poorly worded instruction appears under Search tips: "Require a word to match by placing a + in front of it (Example: +area +population); exclude a word match by placing a – in front of it (Example: +area –population)." When I clicked on "More" searching tips and read the explanation of a NOT search, I realized that the – indicates a Boolean NOT.

I tried searching for various topics. Using the Search tab (i.e., basic search), I searched for "Immigrant Orphans," which revealed four hits. The database did not allow me to view the tables in PDF format, I assume due to the trial status, but I was able to view them as HTML.

Results Display: When I clicked on the title link for the first hit, the table displayed nicely. The table numbers (i.e., Ad977, Ad978, etc.) are the column headings. When I scrolled down in the table, the column headings did not follow the scrolling, which made it a bit difficult to read after the first screen. There are options for "Graph," "Download in Excel," "PDF <size of file>," "Print," "Save Data," "Email Table," "Custom Tables," and "View Selected Series." I tried all of the options. The "Graph" option requires two screens of user responses before the graph appears (but it was easy to choose the defaults). However, I could not get the graph to appear. The system

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Review Scores Composite: ★★★★

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

Content: ★★★★★

The addition of topics not covered in the previous government edition, such as American Indians, slavery, poverty, race, and ethnicity, is especially welcome.

Searchability: ★★

Cambridge should improve the unclear searching directions.

Pricing Options: ★★★★

The FTE pricing structure should include only FTE students not faculty.

Contract Options: ★★★★★

This is a model licensing agreement.

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kept asking me to relabel the axes, which I did, but I never saw the graph, again possibly due to limitations of the trial. Downloading to a spreadsheet worked much better. After entering a few responses, I was able to view not only the spreadsheet itself but also the documentation, which gave definitions of the terms used etc. This would be very useful to researchers. Printing works as expected, printing the table up to 30 lines. The directions recommend printing the PDF version if one needs to print the entire table. I like the Save Data feature a lot. I was able to easily save my table to my Favorites tab, allowing me to go back and retrieve the same table in the future without having to re-execute the search. The E-Mail option worked easily. However, when I went to the test message I sent myself, with the table on immigrant orphans, the link included in the message failed to open the table within the database. It was not able to open the HSUS database site at all. Custom Tables also is a great feature. From the instructions link:

> If you want to compare series from different tables, you can easily do so by creating a custom table that includes all of the series you want to compare. This will allow you to view the data on one screen, and to graph series from different tables on the same grid. You will find the options related to creating and adding to custom tables in the Tables tab; you can access a list of the custom tables you have created through the Favorites tab as well.

Contract Provisions

The licensing agreement is standard. One good feature of the agreement is its clear definitions of terms at the beginning of the agreement. If an institution terminates the license (i.e., no longer pays the annual access fee), a clause allows the licensee to receive the full contents of the database in Word and Excel files, without functionality or programming. The licensing agreement also explicitly allows "the distribution of a copy for teaching purposes to each individual student Authorized User in a class at the Licensee's institution(s)." Also, a specific clause allows users to incorporate parts of the database into course packs and electronic reserves. In the current climate of concern regarding copyright, these clauses are welcome. Interlibrary loan use is prohibited. The agreement is governed by the laws of the state of New York; the general counsel at my institution would require changing that to Rhode Island or deleting it altogether.

Authentication

Access is by IP authentication with unlimited simultaneous users.

Author's Selected References

About the Millennial Edition Online
Samuelson, Robert J. "Our History by the Numbers." *Newsweek* 147, no. 4 (January 23, 2006): 33.

Civil Engineering (April 2006): 73.

LaGuardia, Cheryl. "Statistically Speaking." *Library Journal* (September 1, 2006): 28.

About the Print Edition
Reference and User Services Quarterly 45, no. 4 (Summer 2006): 345–346.

About the Author

Janice G. Schuster has been the Coordinator of Reference Services and Reference Librarian at Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island, since 1991. Her primary responsibilities include reference, managing the library's electronic resources, overseeing development of the reference collection, library instruction, and serving as library liaison to seven academic departments and programs. She previously served as Head of Reference at Stonehill College and Reference/Circulation Librarian at the University of South Carolina-Coastal Carolina College (currently Coastal Carolina University). She holds B.A. and M.L.S. degrees from Indiana University-Bloomington. ∎

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