The American Sociological Association Dues Structure

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In this article, we report on the extent of voluntary compliance by ASA members with the Association dues structure. Comparing our findings from a random survey of ASA members with the distribution of member payments by income-based dues category, we find a fairly high degree of noncompliance in the highest dues category. This implies, and we observe, that higher fractions of ASA members pay dues in the lower income categories than is consistent with their self-reported income.

I. Methodology and Findings

We obtained information from the American Sociological Association regarding the distribution of annual membership dues paid in 1995 by income category. Then we distributed questionnaires to 500 randomly selected non-student, non-foreign “regular” members of the ASA, asking them to reveal their annual income. We asked ASA members to identify their annual income by category defined exactly the same as the Association dues structure. The cover letters sent with the questionnaire card to ASA members read as follows:

Dear______:
My colleague, Richard Beil, and I are conducting a random survey of American Sociological Association members, to develop a profile of members by employment context and/or academic rank, experience, and earnings. We would greatly appreciate your taking a few seconds to answer the three questions on the enclosed card, which has postage guaranteed, and put it in return mail to us.

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Thanks for your time and response.
Sincerely,

The enclosed postcard requested the following information from ASA members:

Annual Income (please check appropriate category):

- Under $15,000
- $15,000 - $19,999
- $20,000 - $29,999
- $30,000 - $39,999
- $40,000 - $49,999
- $50,000 and over

Year doctoral degree conferred: ______

Employment context: Academic—Rank:
- Instructor
- Assistant Professor
- Associate Professor
- Professor

Non-academic
- Public sector
- Private sector

We identified survey recipients by starting at the beginning of the ASA 1995-1996 Directory of Members and selecting every tenth individual with "regular" member status. Whenever there was a possibility that the randomly-selected individual was not a regular member or (s)he clearly did not list an address within the United States, we excluded that individual from our sample, selecting for inclusion instead the next regular member with a U.S. address.

Of the 500 letters mailed in mid-September 1996 to members of the American Sociological Association, we received 294 usable responses, nine were returned as undeliverable and another four responses were unusable. This represents a 61.4 percent response rate. The distributions of annual income reported by ASA members in response to our survey questionnaire are reported in Table 1.

At the high end of the income distribution, we observe that only about 50 percent of ASA members in the highest-income category paid the "correct" dues. However, we observe virtually identical percentages of members with survey-reported income in the $40,000-$49,999 income category and member payment of dues in that income category. Still, a little over one-quarter of the professional membership of the ASA apparently 'cheats' on the dues structure. This shows up as larger-than-expected fractions of members in the lowest income-based dues categories, and the severity of over-representation increases as the annual dues decline.

Thus, we observe that 12.59 percent of our random sample of ASA members...