The Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists honored a Census Bureau Center for Survey Measurement team — headed by Laurie Schwede and in collaboration with Rodney Terry — with an honorable mention Praxis Award for its work on ethnographic observations of 2010 Census enumeration methods and a partial validation check to identify who may be miscounted and why. The team used these mixed methods to explore the wider question: Why do differential undercounts of some minority populations persist across U.S. decennial censuses despite the Census Bureau’s continued efforts to improve the completeness of enumeration across all groups?

Schwede and Terry received the award at the 112th American Anthropological Association’s annual meeting in Chicago on Nov. 22 on behalf of their team of 12 Census Bureau staff and 16 independent ethnographers. Ryan King provided statistical expertise, and Mandi Martínez provided invaluable contributions to developing matching and coding guidelines. Others contributed to the partial validation record check.

The first component of their project, titled “Comparative Ethnographic Studies of Enumeration Methods and Coverage Across Race/Ethnic Groups,” consisted of ethnographers conducting field observations of 2010 Census and census coverage measurement interviews in three census field operations. These included the 2010 Census nonresponse follow-up and update/enumerate operations as well as the later independent census coverage measurement person interview operation. For the first time during a decennial census, multiple ethnographers accompanied interviewers over nine continuous days to systematically observe census interviews and debrief respondents to identify types and sources of possible coverage error. Team members in headquarters later conducted a partial validation check with final census records. The goal was to identify characteristics of households, people and race/ethnic groups at risk of miscounts and reasons for possible miscounts to improve enumeration methods and coverage research for the 2020 Census.

“Every decade, concerns about the underrepresentation of certain populations in the U.S. census drive discussions about demographic completeness and accuracy,” said Terry Redding, chairman of the 2013 Praxis Award Committee. “This application described how anthropological methods were systematically and relevantly applied to identify factors contributing to the underrepresentation of some groups in national population estimates. It shows a meaningful contribution to the potential accuracy of the census, with enormous potential implications in the future.”

Under the mixed-method, controlled-comparison evaluation design, ethnographers observed, audiotaped interviews and conducted debriefings to identify and resolve possible coverage errors and who was affected. They observed and documented
more than 600 interviews in nine specially selected sites around the U.S., focusing on eight race/ethnicity groups — American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, Asian, black, non-Hispanic white, Hispanic, Middle Eastern — and one “general” site. The second component of the evaluation was a partial validation of observed households. This was done by matching and comparing the ethnographer-observed households and people to final unedited 2010 Census records on where they should be counted to identify possible inconsistencies and coverage errors and the reasons for the possible miscounts.

“These ethnographic studies are an excellent complement to the more nationally representative and quantifiable results that we obtained from the majority of 2010 Census evaluations, experiments and assessments,” Associate Director for Decennial Census Frank Vitrano said. “The focused work of these ethnographers helped us learn things that we could never learn from our other methods during a census.”

The overall evaluation report may be accessed at <http://www.census.gov/2010census/pdf/comparative_ethnographic_studies_of_ENUMERATION_methods_and_coverage_across_race_and_ethnic_groups.pdf>. Mark Edberg, an associate professor of the School of Public Health and Health Services at George Washington University, received the 2013 Praxis Award for his project titled “Using the Concept of Social Well-Being to Develop and Implement a Framework for UNICEF Planning and Evaluating Efforts to Achieve Rights and Development Goals for Children and Families.”

There were two other honorable mentions.

The Department of Anthropology of the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, led by Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Stephen Nash, was honored for its contributions to the complex debates surrounding the care and return of cultural items and human remains in museums. Madelyn Iris and Rebecca Berman of Chicago-based CJE Seniorlife were honored for their work examining services for low-income caregivers of older adults.

The Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists is the oldest and largest regional association of professional anthropologists in the world today. Founded in 1976, the association serves as a resource and career development center for anthropologists seeking to apply their knowledge and skills to practical problems for the betterment of society. For more information, go to <www.wapadc.org>.

The Praxis Award — awarded every two years since 1981 — is a competition for excellence and achievement in translating anthropological knowledge into action. Entries for this international award demonstrate anthropology’s relevance and effectiveness in addressing contemporary human problems, especially for projects in client-based contexts. Applicants are reviewed and rated by a three-member panel of expert anthropological practitioners. For a list of past winners, go to <http://wapa.cloverpad.org/praxis>.