Before introducing the speakers, some background on the role of data linkage in mortality research might be in order. Three basic applications deserve mention: obtaining correspondence between information on the death certificate and the population base, adding information to the certificate, and matching studies for epidemiological purposes. As will be seen, the five papers at this session fall, at least loosely, into one of these categories.

Correspondence of Information.—The mortality rate is traditionally computed by relating the statistics derived from death certificates to the corresponding population sample. When there is a lack of correspondence between the information recorded on the death certificate and on the population census schedule, the problem is more serious when the information called for differs in the two source documents. An example of this is the occupation item. The death certificate calls for the usual occupation, whereas the census schedule asks for the present occupation. One way of eliminating this lack of correspondence is to match the death certificate to the census schedule, and use the census information on occupation for both the numerator and denominator of the rate. (The Koteen-Grayson and Rosenberg, et al papers at today's session belong in this general area.)

Adding Information.—Another important aspect of record linkage is the possibility of extending the study beyond the information available on death certificates by using the data in the linked record. For example, the death certificate item on occupation is usually the primary source for mortality research by linking data from the record systems of the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), Internal Revenue Service (IRS), and the Social Security Administration (SSA). The system would include:

1. mortality information from NCHS's statistical processing of death certificates;
2. individual income tax items obtained as a by-product of IRS Master File processing (detailed income data, deduction and tax data, residence information, and the occupation entry from Forms 1040 and 1040A); and
3. longitudinal earnings and benefit histories developed at Social Security as part of its Continuous Work History Sample.

An interagency planning process for LASS has been underway now for nearly a year. In conjunction with this collaborative effort, the Social Security Administration's Office of Research and Statistics is producing a series of working notes as a means of documenting the project's progress. Thus far, the LASS Working Notes Series provides meeting notes, agency correspondence, and related papers and documents in six reports. Additional reports will be compiled as the planning process continues. Copies are available upon request by writing to:

Beth Kilss
Social Security Administration
Universal North Bldg., Rm. 320-H
1875 Connecticut Ave., N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20009