

Australasian Region

Newsletter

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From the President, Melissa Dobbie



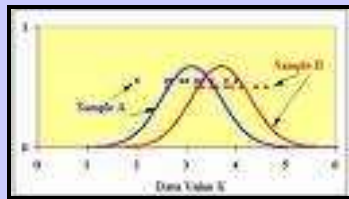
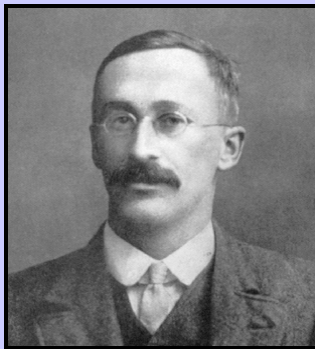
This will be my last newsletter as President of the region, with changing of the guard happening earlier than usual in September to enable me to take up a new challenge - the imminent arrival of my second child. Foremost, I am very grateful to the membership for the opportunity to lead & help shape our society. The past two years in this role have gone fairly quickly, but I think quite a bit has been achieved in this time. Organising the 2007 regional conference in Coffs Harbour was certainly a highlight of my term & from feedback I received, sounds like others also found their Coffs conference experience worthwhile. As part of my legacy, I now leave the society with a functioning & hopefully useful website, a regional newsletter (the one you're reading!) to provide regional updates & enable communication between our vast membership, & a very healthy regional council. I would like to thank all members of the regional council for their help & contributions throughout my term as President & hope they continue to play active roles for the incoming President, Dr Graham Hepworth of the University of Melbourne. I'm sure he will lead the society with great capability, foresight & enthusiasm during his term as President.

Congratulations to Australasian members in election to IBS positions

It was recently announced at the International Biometric Conference in Dublin that one of our members Professor Kaye Basford of The University of Queensland, had been elected as Incoming Vice-President of the society. This means that Kaye will serve as VP of the International Biometric Society in 2009, President in 2010-11 and Past President in 2012. Congratulations to Kaye on this wonderful news, both for herself and for the region.

Also, congratulations are due to Dr David Baird of VSN International in New Zealand for his successful election to the IBS council for the period 2008-11. David will be a member of the IBS Strategic Planning Committee in particular.

"Biometry, the active pursuit of biological knowledge by quantitative methods." - R.A. Fisher, 1947
(See <http://www.tibs.org/> for details of this quote)



IBC Dublin - a young statistician's perspective

By Daniel Pagendam*, PhD student, University of Queensland

When the IBS Australasian region offered me the chance to speak at IBC2008 I was very excited. Not only was the conference offering talks on an impressive range of topics, with some very distinguished speakers, but it was also a celebration of the centenary of William Sealy Gosset's (student's) t-test. Gosset contributed greatly to two things that I enjoy during his career as "Chief Brewer": statistics and Guinness, so I had very high hopes for my week in Dublin.

I was lucky enough to be speaking in the very first session on the first day of the conference, which meant that my nerves were soon put to rest and I was rewarded with some constructive feedback on my talk. I soon met a number of other young researchers working on similar statistical problems and we had many interesting discussions over a pint or two of the "statistical brew". There were optimal volumes of statistics and Guinness and I am now planning to collaborate with one of my new friends on some joint research, which is exciting.

For me the highlight of the conference (apart from presenting my own work of course!) was the Gosset session in which a number of esteemed speakers, including Sir David Cox, provided insight into Gosset's life and his work at the Guinness brewery. Pictures of the bulky, mechanical calculators that statisticians like Fisher and Gosset used in the early twentieth century gave me a renewed appreciation for my laptop (and no reason to ever complain that it is too slow again).

All in all, the conference as a whole was very enjoyable and provided much food for thought and new ideas for my own research. I highly recommend others to attend the next IBC in Brazil, which will undoubtedly be just as enjoyable.

** Daniel won the IBS Australasian Region travel award to attend IBC and presented a talk on "Optimal sampling of the S-I-S epidemic".*

IBC Dublin wrap-up - Bob Forrester, Australian National University

Australia was well represented by delegates from several institutions at the XXIVth International Biometric Conference in Dublin. The ANU with nine delegates would have been one of the best represented of any institutions worldwide. With over 900 registrations and around 400 papers and a similar number of posters it was a challenge choosing which of the 7 parallel sessions (one of which was a poster session) to attend. The session chairs did a first rate job ensuring that speakers kept on time and this enabled people to move easily between venues. Half the posters were on show for the first half of the week and the other half for the latter part of the week. Although presenters were only present during their particular "session" it was good to be able to browse the posters during the breaks. The posters were of high quality and covered a large number of topics.

There were several special interest sessions at this conference including one on the Best Biometrics Papers, Showcase of papers published in JABES, Showcase for Biometry in South America (IBC hosts in 2010) and others in the medical areas. I managed to attend the Biometrics and South American sessions and the presentations in both were of a very high standard. The best *Biometrics* paper for 2006 was "Pairwise fitting of mixed models for the joint modelling of multivariate longitudinal profiles" and was presented by Geert Verbeke, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium. The best *Biometrics* paper for 2007 was "Semiparametric regression of multidimensional genetic pathway data: least-squares kernel machines and linear mixed models" presented by Dawei Lui of Brown University, USA. Both speakers gave very compelling presentations of their work. Professor Peter Diggle, who is well known to many in Australia, was the discussant and gave an excellent critique of both papers.

The organizers had done a good job in scheduling the various sessions and there were only a couple of occasions when I would have liked to attend two sessions simultaneously. Unfortunately one of the major sessions of the conference, associated with the Gosset 100th year anniversary, was not in the largest lecture theatre. It was very crowded with standing room only and appallingly hot at the rear of the theatre where I was seated. It was a difficult task to feed the large number of registrants during the lunch breaks, however the quality of the food provided did not match the standards set at other IBCs I have attended.



Some Australian delegates having a pint at IBC in Dublin including Alan Welsh (ANU), Bob Forrester (ANU), Jeff Wood (ANU), Emma Knight (ANU) and Peter Clarke (WA Dept of Ag).

IBC Dublin wrap-up - Alan Welsh, Australian National University

Two special events at the Conference celebrated the 100th anniversary of "Student's" famous 1908 Biometrika paper on the t-distribution. These were the unveiling of a plaque commemorating "Student" in the Guinness Storehouse on Monday night and a special session dedicated to "Student" on Wednesday morning. The plaque was unveiled by two of "Student's" descendants who also attended the special session.

W.S. Gosset has always been celebrated at Guinness as someone who played a major role in the development of scientific brewing (as opposed to traditional brewing based on instinct) but they have not really acknowledged his importance as a biometrician/statistician. The new plaque now fills this gap. It is located at the entrance level in the barley store so is quite prominent and visible to the general public. Guinness arranged a very enjoyable reception on the fifth floor of the Storehouse from which there is a famous view of Dublin. It goes without saying that the drink of choice was the Guinness which was widely acknowledged to taste better in the Storehouse than anywhere else in the world. It was unfortunate that the ceremony only allowed a restricted number of conference participants to attend.

The special session on Wednesday was more popular than expected by the organisers so ended up with many people sitting in the aisles and standing. The talks were given by Jim Hanley (McGill University), Stephen Senn (University of Glasgow), Steve Ziliak (Roosevelt University) and David Cox (Nuffield College). Jim Hanley highlighted Student's 1908 paper and, in particular, his use of simulation to check his work. He argued that we should all read this paper. Stephen Senn discussed the Cushny and Peebles (1905) data (which were used by "Student") and the background to the trial in Kalamazoo (Michigan) where the data were obtained. David Cox spoke about exchange between "Student" and Fisher over randomisation which occurred shortly before "Student's" death in 1937. The papers were all presented very well and made for a most fitting and enjoyable tribute to "Student".



Kaye Basford (UQ, Incoming IBS VP), Alan Welsh (ANU), Sue Wilson (ANU, IBS President 1998-99) at the Guinness factory in Dublin

Regional website update www.biometrics.org.au

New to the website since the last newsletter

- ❖ Member profiles of Rachel Fewster and Scott Foster - see <http://www.biometrics.org.au/profile.php>

Coming soon! - a link to a list of regional office bearers over the course of time, further information about the next regional conference (Taupo, NZ, December 2009), and more member profiles.

Any suggestions for improvements or comments? We welcome your feedback (email webmaster@biometrics.org.au).

2008 IBS AR Honours scholarship award winner



Karyn Reeves, undertaking an Honours year in Statistics under supervisor of Professor Ian James at Murdoch University, Western Australia, was the successful applicant of the 2008 IBS Australasian Region Honours scholarship for \$1000. Karyn writes about her Honours thesis plans: "My honours project focuses on the problem of founder effects in HIV host-virus genetic association studies, including a review of the methods used to adjust for these effects, with a particular emphasis on the method of principal components analysis. These association studies are undertaken to improve the general knowledge and understanding of HIV, but their results may have implications for the development of tailored vaccines, or the clinical management of HIV-infected patients. In order to understand the true relationship between the immune system and the virus, and the way in which the virus adapts itself to the immune system of the host, it is essential that methods are developed to control for all confounding. The present methods are cumbersome, and their inferential properties are lacking in rigorous assessment." Karyn's application indicated that she was clearly one of the top Honours/4th year statistics students in Australia and New Zealand, so we're hopeful that this scholarship will encourage her to pursue a career in Biometrics/Biostatistics.

Regional Biometrics 2009 conference

Planning is underway for the next regional conference of the society. **Taupo** on New Zealand's North Island will be the location for the next conference and it will be held in the week of **Sunday 29 Nov - Thurs 3 Dec 2009**. So please mark your diaries now and keep it in mind when planning your conference attendance for 2009. Dr Kathy Ruggiero, University of Auckland is the Chair of the Local Organising Committee with Dr Hans Hockey providing important on-ground support in the Taupo region. Dr James Curran heads up the Scientific Program Committee. Further details will be made available on the regional website in due course. In the meantime, any questions, please email Kathy (k.ruggiero@auckland.ac.nz).