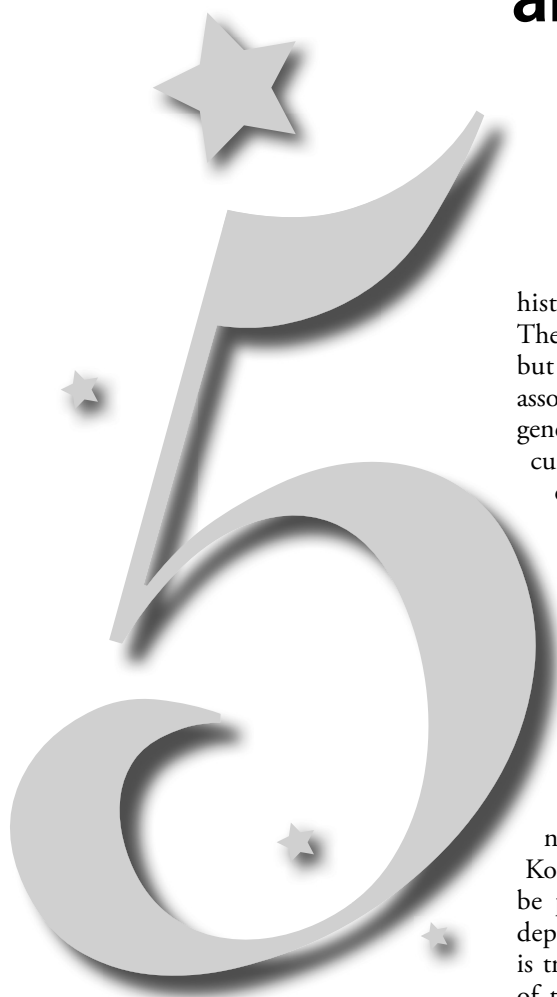


Harvard Statistics: Quintuple Celebrations and Celebrating Quintuples

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history and future of this department. The choice of five was really not a choice, but rather the obvious: current and past associates of the department, the founding generation, the previous department chairs, current and ex-staff members, and those deans who understand the value of statistics and/or statisticians.

What I could not possibly realize then was how little time it would take before another five toasts would be in order, and how that five ignited so many more fives.

The first toast is to Samuel Kou, who just became the fifth senior professor in the department. The main significance of this appointment is not making five of us, but rather that Kou is the first junior faculty member to be promoted to tenure from within the department since Art Dempster, which is truly a milestone in the 50-year history of the department. Who says the department does not promote its own junior faculty? We now have established the existence theorem—the next step is to prove it is not unique!

The second toast is to our graduate program, which just won a \$25,000 Dean's Prize for Innovations in Graduate Education, a recently instituted annual award to a department that has undertaken significant innovations in the previous three years. Our innovations include the following:

Stat 303: *The Art and Practice of Teaching Statistics*, a year-long, required course for all first-year PhD students designed with the dual goals of discipline-specific teaching training and career development

Stat 399: *Problem Solving in Statistics*, a “transition toward research” course designed for second-year PhD students that bridges the gap from individual textbook knowledge to more integrated

and insightful thinking with the study of recent qualifying examination problems

Team teaching and collaborative course design among faculty members and between faculty and graduate students, such as in the core graduate courses team taught by Joe Blitzstein and Carl Morris and in the newly introduced Stat 105: *Real-Life Statistics: Your Chance for Happiness (or Misery)* (see the April issue of *Amstat News*)

The third toast is to our department for being the only department at Harvard to win the Derek C. Bok Award for Excellence in Graduate Student Teaching of Undergraduates two years in a row, and during the first two years of the award's existence. The Bok award is given annually to five graduate students who have “demonstrated excellence in undergraduate teaching or advising beyond achievement of the high quantitative evaluation score.”

In 2006–2007, Paul Edlefsen, our first departmental teaching fellow (a new position at Harvard for supporting departmental teaching excellence), won an inaugural award for his passion and devotion to teaching and, most significantly, for his effectiveness in training and motivating other students to become effective teaching fellows (see www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2007/05.03/01teachers.html).

Not to be outdone, in 2007–2008, our second departmental teaching fellow, Paul Baines, won a second Bok award out of more than 400 eligible candidates. Baines won the award for his initiatives and innovations in building departmental teaching infrastructures, including the creation of three teaching guides (see www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2008/05.01/07-teaching.html).

So, now the pressure is on our third departmental teaching fellow. (Incidentally,

Many believe good things come in threes. Others are greedier, hoping for sixes or even sevens. For Harvard University's Statistics Department, the right number appears to be five. Of course, human superstition about numbers is a great example of selection bias, or our almost innate tendency to mistake coincidence for divine intervention. But whatever your tendency, I am inviting you to share with me—over five glasses of wine—my newly discovered appreciation of the quintessential value of the number 5. (If wine is not your cup of tea, you could become equally intoxicated by reading this article five times.)

Harvard statistics celebrated its 50th anniversary last October (see the May issue of *Amstat News*). During the banquet at this occasion, I made five toasts to five groups of individuals who have helped create the

the check Edlefsen received was for \$1,000, while Baines' was for \$1,000.01. If anyone has any insight into how this is related to Harvard's wealth in the face of inflation, a glass of 1975 Chateau Mouton Rothschild is on me!)

The fourth toast is again directed to the entire department for reaching yet another milestone: welcoming a class of 13 PhD students in the coming fall, marking the first time in the department's history that this count has reached the double digits. I want to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues, staff members, and current students for their hard work in admissions and recruiting. And, as the department chair, I cannot miss this opportunity to advertise. Please send your best student, colleague, friend, relative, neighbor, soul mate—whoever you believe will do wonders for statistics after proper training—to us, as we do wonderful things here for our students. Not convinced by all the awards? Pay us a visit in the fall and enjoy Harvard's (the world's?) first massage chair for graduate students, paid for by the \$25,000 innovation fund. ...

My fifth toast is reserved for a truly quintessential event, an event to which all are invited. Whether it is coincidence or divine intervention, among the dozen current and emeritus ladder faculty members, 50% hit a "quintessential" birthday this year: 85, 70, 65, 45, 40, and 30. (What is the chance of that?) Those below the age of 50 are, of course, too busy preparing their quintessential papers to enjoy birthdays, but a grand celebration is in order for those who have already made quintessential contributions, namely Herman Chernoff, Carl Morris, and Donald Rubin. And what could be a more fitting way to honor each of them than by celebrating one of their publications that is also having a "quintessential" birthday (see the invitation)?

Furthermore, this year sees the 100th anniversary of William Gosset's publication of the "Student" t distribution (see the commemorative articles in the March issue of *JASA*). Very appropriately, one of our PhD students, Andrew Thomas,

has contacted various brewers to sponsor a "Student t party"; if you are puzzled by the connection of "Student" (not students!) with beer, it's time to quench your thirst at a historical bar. We naturally plan to combine the birthday celebrations with the Student t party, not least for its great

symbolism of our commitment to faculty and student togetherness ... inside and outside the classroom ... sober or somber. See <http://stat.harvard.edu> for details. ■

Invitation

Quintessential Contributions: Celebrating Major Birthdays of Statistical Ideas and Their Inventors

When: Saturday, September 27, 2008

Where: Radcliffe Gym, 18 Mason Street, Cambridge, MA

Celebrating the 65th birthday of Donald B. Rubin and the 30th birthday of his "Multiple Imputations in Sample Surveys: A Phenomenological Bayesian Approach to Nonresponse" (*Proceedings of the American Statistical Association, Section on Survey Research Methods*, 1978)

Invited Speaker: Fritz Scheuren

Celebrating the 70th birthday of Carl N. Morris and the 25th birthday of his "Parametric Empirical Bayes Inference: Theory and Applications" (*JASA*, 1983)

Invited Speaker: Andrew Gelman

Celebrating the 85th birthday of Herman Chernoff and the 35th birthday of his "The Use of Faces to Represent Points in K-Dimensional Space Graphically" (*JASA*, 1973)

Invited Speaker: Steve Wang

Celebrating the 100th birthday of W. S. "Student" Gosset's "The Probable Error of a Mean" (*Biometrika*, 1908)

Invited Speaker: Stephen Stigler

Student Presentation: "From Student to students"

Evening "Student t Party": at Cambridge Queen's Head Pub