Accepting rejections

Xiao-Li Meng took a humorous approach to the sore subject of handling rejections when he was part of a panel, "Reflections on Rejections," sponsored by Harvard's Bureau of Study Counsel (BSC). We publish his article here to amuse and comfort the many IMS members who have to deal with rejections of their research papers. The *Boston Globe* article, "Accepting rejection: High-flying Harvard students get tips on how to rebound from the inevitable 'thanks but no thanks'" (April 21) is at http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2009/04/21/accepting_rejection/.

A (Hopefully) Well Accepted Statistical Theory of Rejection

Theorem 1: *For any acceptance worth competing for, the probability of a randomly-selected applicant being rejected is higher than the probability of being accepted.*

Proof: **Anything worth competing for means more than 50% people will be rejected.**

"Okay, but I am not a randomly-selected person! I am the best of my school/class/peer group." Yes—but so are many others who are competing with you! Sooner or later, someone is going to beat you, because…

Theorem 2: *A local maximum cannot exceed the global maximum.*

Proof: **By definition, the global maximum is the maximum of all local maxima.**

"But I am really the best, the global maximum." Sure, you may be the champion of Ultimate Frisbee, and chess, and tennis, but ultimately there will a game that is simply not your game. In other words…

Theorem 3: *The probability that you will be accepted for everything you compete for is zero.*

Proof: **You wouldn't be reading this if this theorem were false.**

"Alright, I admit that I was rejected a couple of times. But that was really unfair, as everyone told me that I should have won/been accepted!" True, if you modify "everyone" by "everyone who talked to me", because…

Theorem 4: *The probability of hearing that you should be a winner is higher than that of hearing you should be a loser.*

"If you have never been late for your flight, you have wasted too much time at the airport. If you have never been rejected for love, you have not loved enough."

Andrew Gelman, Professor of Statistics and Political Science, Columbia University

Proof: **How many times have you told someone you know, "Hey, you are going to be a loser!"?**

"But I still think it was unfair, because I was just so well qualified!" True again, but there are others who were equally so. Even if you make into the final two and a fair coin has to be tossed to decide, the very phrase fair implies that you still have 50% of chance of being rejected!

Grand Theorem: ***Statistically, you are rejected, and probabilistically, it is fair.***

Note: Xiao-Li Meng wishes that your personal experiences reject this theory.

Janet L. Norwood Award: Call For Nominations

The Section on Statistical Genetics and the Department of Biostatistics in the School of Public Health, University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) are pleased to request nominations for the Eighth Annual Janet L. Norwood Award for Outstanding Achievement by a Woman in the Statistical Sciences. The award will be conferred on Wednesday, September 16, 2009. The award recipient will be invited to deliver a lecture at the UAB award ceremony, and will receive all expenses paid to deliver this lecture, a plaque, and a $5,000 prize.

Eligible individuals are women who have completed their terminal degree, have made outstanding contributions to the statistical sciences, and, if selected, are willing to deliver a lecture at the award ceremony. For additional details about the award, please feel invited to visit our website at http://www.soph.uab.edu/ssg/norwoodaward/aboutaward.

To nominate a candidate, send a full curriculum vitae accompanied by a letter not more than two pages long describing the nature of the candidate's contributions. Contributions may be in the area of development and evaluation of statistical methods, teaching of statistics, application of statistics, or any other activity that can arguably be said to have advanced the field of statistical science. Self-nominations are acceptable. Please send nominations to: *David B. Allison, PhD, Professor & Head Section on Statistical Genetics, Department of Biostatistics, RPHB 327, University of Alabama at Birmingham, 1665 University Boulevard, Birmingham, Alabama 35294-0022*

t (205) 975-9169 **f** (205) 975-2541 **e** dallison@uab.edu

Deadline for receipt of nominations is Monday, June 29. Electronic submissions of nominations are accepted and encouraged. The winner will be announced by Friday, July 3.