Class 01: Introduction to MAT/SST115

Held: Wednesday, 23 January 2008

Summary: We start the course off in the normal way: By exploring the subject, your motivations for studying the subject, and the ways in which we will study the subject.

Notes:
- For Friday’s class, please do all of Topic 1 and read the preliminaries for Topic 2.
- For Friday’s class, please fill out the course survey.
- Due: [Introductory Statistics Survey]

Overview:
- Preliminaries.
- Why are you here?
- What is statistics, anyway?
- Some silly (or not-so-silly) examples.
- A bit about the course.
- Comparing sections.
- Parting thoughts.

Preliminaries
- You are in section 3 of Grinnell’s Introduction to Statistics, which is cross-listed as SST-115 and MAT-115.
- My name is Samuel A. Rebelsky. I go by "Sam"
- My co-instructor is Katherine McClelland. She tends to go by "Katherine" (or at least I think she does).
- We’re still working on finding a class mentor.
- We’ll start class with two related questions ...

Why Are You Taking Statistics?
- All-too-common answer: Because it’s a requirement for Major (e.g., Psychology, Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology)
- So, why is it a requirement for that major?
- Other reasons we’d hope for
- It’s a different way of approaching the world, and I consider the exploration of different ways to approach the world essential to my liberal arts education.
- Statistical data are used in many ways, and I want to be an informed citizen.
What is statistics, anyway?

- One perspective: The study of data
  - How to summarize large quantities of data
  - How to find useful patterns in data
  - How do design techniques for gathering useful data
  - ...
- More generally: A technique for understanding the world around us
- Employs a variety of techniques
  - Some are quantitative: Formulae and the results of those formulate can tell us about data
  - Some are visual: We use charts and graphs and other drawings
  - Some are even algorithmic: We apply a series of operations
- Even more generally: A gateway to quantitative literacy, the ability to read and write quantitative information.
- Historical [modified from Damn Lies and Statistics by Joel Best]
  - Began with attempts to quantify information about “the state”: population and aspects of populations. (“political arithmetic”)
  - People who gathered such information were called “statists”
  - Eventually, the work they did was called “statistics”
- In the 20th century, more general techniques were developed to understand and analyze data.

Some silly (or not-so-silly) examples of statistical claims

- “Every year since 1950, the number of American children gunned down has doubled.” (From Damned Lies and Statistics)
- “The Illinois legislature has appointed a task force to determine why half of the babies born in Cook County Hospital are below median weight.” (Approximate quotation from Chicago Tribune in early 1990’s)
- “Most faculty receive only 5’s and 6’s on their end of course evaluations. It’s clearly a case of Lake Wobegon: Everyone is above average.” (Overheard from a faculty colleague)
- “A study shows that the average worth of someone who attended Harvard in the 1970’s is close to half a billion dollars” (Based on a past anecdote)
- “The increase of disease during the 1950’s is directly proportional to the increase of activity. Clearly, activity causes disease.” (Study described by wife).

A Bit About The Course

- Our goal is to help you think statistically.
  - To read and think critically about statistical evidence
  - To use statistical techniques to form conclusions or hypotheses about data
  - To present statistical results in a variety of forms (spoken, written, visual)
- You do not learn these things by watching other people do them. You learn by practice.
  - We use a workshop-style approach
  - Most days, you’ll work on a variety of problems in class with a partner
○ You’ll need to be an active participant in your own learning
○ Working with a partner helps you improve your communication skills
○ And “two heads are better than one”

● Our textbook is *Workshop Statistics*
● I recommend that you use a separate lab notebook to record your answers.
● There is a vast (or not so vast) infrastructure to help you with the course
  ○ Sam
  ○ Katherine
  ○ The class mentor, if we ever find one
  ○ The resources of the Math Lab
  ○ Your colleagues
  ○ ...

### Comparing Sections

● There are three sections of 115 this semester and two sections of 209
● 115 is intended for students without significant background in calculus
  ○ Students with such background should consider switching to 209
● 209 is taught by statisticians; 115 is taught by users of statistics
● All three sections of 115 are using *Workshop Statistics*
● This section meets three days per week, the others meet four days per week
● Partialy because of that, we’re taking a somewhat different approach to the material.
  ○ I’m following a somewhat steady pace through the material, with one Topic per day
  ○ The other sections are mixing things up a bit, often requiring a bit more out-of class work
● I’m also using a different statistics environment, R, rather than Minitab.
● This section is also much bigger.

### Some Parting Thoughts

● Be responsible in exiting the building
  ○ Conserve energy
  ○ Don’t damage experiments
● Two assignments for Friday
  ○ Introductory survey
  ○ Topic 1 in *Workshop Statistics*