

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 formulae 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
- Partially 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*

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