
Central Moments of Our Lives

REASONS TO CELEBRATE

Write your own here: _____

KNOWN BIRTHDAYS

Jeff Pan, and actor Kevin Costner celebrate their birthdays today.

Shari Modur shares her birthday with singers Dolly Parton and Robert Palmer. We sing "Happy Birthday to you" for her tomorrow, January 19.

Chaoran Ye and actress Diane Lane celebrate on January 22.

PUZZLES OF THE WEEK

"Birthday Problem with Liars" from Dr. Joe Verducci

Last week, while doing the "What is the probability that at least two students in this room have the same birthday?" problem in my Stat 427 class of 50 students, I was surprised when one of the students bet me \$50 that no two students would. As soon as I took the bet, he tried to solicit the other students, promising to split half of his winnings among all those who agreed to lie. What seemed like a comfortable 97% chance of me winning was now reduced, but by how much?

My procedure for checking if two students have the same birthday is first to get all those with birthdays in January to raise their hands; then I call on them sequentially to announce the date (17th, 6th, etc.) and hear if any two dates are the same; if there are no matches, I proceed to February, etc. If a person had been solicited "to the dark side," he/she would simply lie if his/her date had been previously announced, and instead give a non-matching date. My question is this: supposing that some proportion p of the class has been won over to the dark side, what is the effect on the theoretical probability P_n that two students in a class of n share the same birthday?

It turns out that a surprisingly good approximation is $P_n(1-p^3)$, but I haven't been able to justify it. I'll split my winnings from the 427 student with anyone who comes up with either a good justification of the

approximation or an exact formula. Disclosure: I didn't collect the \$50 in cash, but the student has agreed to buy \$50 worth of pizza for a class party at the end of the quarter; any solver will be invited to the party.

Mystery Photo- from Dr. Bill Notz

"Identify the gentleman. He is famous and has had a major impact on statistics. I will give no more hints, and I don't know if anyone will be able to guess who he is. However, I was present at a talk he gave and after his talk, dozens of people came up to get his autograph. How many statistics talks have you been to where the speaker was swamped with autograph seekers?"- Dr. Bill Notz



FACULTY PROFILE

(Dr. Notz was not interviewed for this excerpt)



I was born in Washington DC and come from a family of teachers. My great-great grandfather was a pastor. My grandfather was a Professor and Dean of the Foreign Service School at Georgetown University. My grandmother was the law librarian for Washington College of Law. My father taught a few short courses at American University and George Washington University. So I guess teaching is in my blood.

I came to Ohio State in the year made famous by George Orwell. That was also the year of the legendary Apple Super Bowl ad (perhaps that is why I have always been a fan of Macintosh computers). During my time here I have served as course coordinator for several of our large service courses, vice-chair (during which the battle of Stat. 133 occurred – a story for another time), acting chair (I initiated and supervised the move of the department to the third and fourth floors of Cockins Hall), and associate dean. I have edited the journal *Technometrics* and am now editing the *Journal of Statistics Education*. My current interests are experimental design, computer experiments (with thanks to Tom Santner who got me hooked on the area), and education.

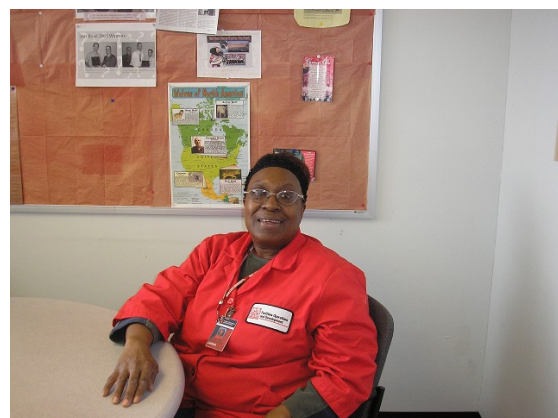
I enjoy teaching. A high school teacher and four professors had a major role in shaping this interest. After giving a presentation in high school, a teacher commented that I should consider engineering

because I had no future as a teacher. I never liked being told I couldn't do something. In college, a graduate teaching assistant taught my linear algebra course. His lectures were so clear and organized that I mimicked his style when I first taught. In graduate school I took real analysis from a professor named Anthony Knapp. The course was very difficult but his lectures were superb. I don't think I ever had to use the textbook other than to find the statements of homework problems. My thesis advisor, Jack Kiefer, is notorious for research papers that are difficult to read, but his lectures were brilliant. He was a genius at developing homework problems. If you did his homework you essentially worked through the seminal papers in the field and were ready to begin research upon completing the course. Finally, while I taught at Purdue University, I had the privilege of teaching with David Moore. From him I learned a lot about organizing and running courses. We have been friends ever since and I was surprised and delighted when he asked me to take over his book *Statistics Concepts and Controversies*. I still have a rare hard cover first edition.

In addition to being a Macintosh nut, my vices include golf (watch out Chris Hans), woodworking (especially turning pens – during graduate school I developed a love of using fountain pens), and running. I have lots of other interests, but for the sake of space, you will have to ask me about them.

STAFF APPRECIATION CORNER

Ladonna Cottrell gives us her ever-so-friendly smile. Thanks, Ladonna. If it hadn't been for you, our offices would have been regular pigsties.



STUDENT PROFILES

Chris “Citizen Bee” Sroka writes



I am a fourth year Ph.D. student working for the Statistical Consulting Service. I am originally from the Detroit area, but came to OSU by way of Washington, DC, where I worked as an economist for Congress.

Here are some esoteric details of my life. I grew up in a house built by Henry Ford for his alleged mistress. We had a backhoe for odd jobs around the house. I became pretty good at operating it, so I have at least one marketable skill. My greatest athletic achievement was when our team won first place in the Catholic Central High School Father-Son Bowling League.

People often confuse me with someone who likes to read. In fact, I hate reading books. The last time that I read a book completely and non-compulsorily was in sixth grade. The book was *Alien*, and it was not better than the movie. In addition to not reading, I spend my free time engaged in amateur astronomy.

The picture above was taken near the Sleeping Bear Sand Dunes on the shore of Lake Michigan. If you need directions, just look at where I’m pointing. I enjoy camping with my snazzy wife at the great national parks in this country. Our goal is to visit all of them. We’ve been to Shenandoah, Assateague, Great Smoky Mountains, Zion, and Yosemite. This year, we hope to visit the Grand Canyon or Glacier.

For those of you who read the official Department Newsletter, you know that I was once on

the TV show “Jeopardy!”. This was actually my second national television appearance. In 1993, I appeared on C-SPAN for a competition called “Citizen Bee” (think spelling bee with American history, civics, and geography). I won \$9500, much more than I earned on “Jeopardy!”.

Chaoran Ye performs a snow dance...



Hi, this is Chaoran, and you can also call me Joyce. This is my second year here, and I have enjoyed most parts of life in Columbus, except for the freezing winter days. Yup, here they come... I am from Shanghai, China where it barely snows (fewer than 5 times since I've ever had a memory). Uncomfortable with cold weather, I do enjoy ice-skating. Actually I took two courses in ice-skating last year and finally learned how to do backward cross-over.

I also like to travel. I had a wonderful trip to Southern California this Christmas and I hope that my next Christmas will be spent somewhere even warmer than Los Angeles. On my list are the national parks, and I plan to visit at least two of them this year. Any travel tips from you are more than welcome.

Good luck and enjoy the winter break!