

Some remarks on assumptions

In just the last two to three months, ISI has been requested or invited to be represented in seven (too many to list here) different events or organisations across six different countries and internationally.

This illustrates the importance of ISI and the high regard in which it is held internationally. But it also demonstrates the assumption that ISI is always there and able to meet international assumptions and expectations. Both the high regard and the assumptions are founded in ISI's long and illustrious history and the dedication of its office bearers and members across the world. This is an opportunity to again record sincere acknowledgement and appreciation on behalf of the whole ISI family to all who have represented, and will represent, ISI across the world.



Explicit and implicit awareness of assumptions is core to our discipline of statistics in all its forms and manifestations. Across all levels of statistics education, from year 1 to the most sophisticated of workplaces, it has been emphasized many times over many years that it is essential to teach awareness of assumptions – identification, evaluation and critiquing. One of the most valuable skills we can teach in statistics thinking is the skill of constructive questioning: identification and articulation of questions; querying of data, analysis, interpretation, assumptions and presentation.

Other dimensions of assumptions in our discipline relate to the pervasiveness and context dependency of statistics. Understanding and using statistics develop within reference frameworks - in other disciplines, in applications, in socio-economic and historical structures. Whether in applications, consulting, collaborations, research or teaching, we must not assume that our reference frameworks are the same as others. This has been brought home to me again and again in teaching or collaboration across disciplines and countries. For example, in 2008 as just one part of my Australian Senior Teaching Fellowship program, I sat in a variety of university classrooms in six different countries. Despite my long experience of diversity of statistics reference frameworks, I was once again amazed by the differences where people often assume there are none or few. Again this demonstrates the importance of global interaction and sharing of experiences that are at the heart of activities, conferences and networking of the ISI family.

As a final comment (for now) on assumptions, we often assume that our colleagues are also members of ISI. When we ask, the response is often “oh yes, I should” or “I’d like to be an elected member.” So, once again, the message is – don’t assume your colleague is a member – ask.

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