

From P-Values to President

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My work as a professional statistician has exposed me to many different areas of life and learning. Although the career path may not have been obvious, I was well prepared for the wide variety of activities involved in being president of a dynamic research-intensive university.

My doctoral research concerned statistical discrimination, with particular application to medical diagnosis. Essentially we matched the case histories of new and undiagnosed patients with a data base of previously diagnosed cases and symptoms. In other work over the years, I have been involved in estimating the forms of economic demand functions, using data on ocean whitecaps from orbiting satellites to infer wind speed, and a legal case where it was alleged that money went missing in bank branches more often when a particular bank official was present (statistical analysis resulted in the withdrawal of the accusation).

One of the more fun applications of statistics with which I was involved was the analysis of scoring on our local golf course. For handicap purposes, it is necessary to rank the holes on a golf course in order of difficulty, and every golf club does so. We considered the proposition that the difficulty of a hole would depend on wind speed and direction, developed a statistical model for this dependence, and applied it to data collected from our local club. This led to a reordering of the rankings for the course and an article in the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*.

This wide variety of applications and of interests helped to prepare me for the even wider spectrum of activities involved in being president of a university. Every day I deal with myriad issues and people, and certainly my quantitative background is a significant bonus in addressing many complex issues—although there are times when I think being an accountant might be more of a help than being a statistician!